

Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: World War I Unit

This lesson was created by educators working with the Alabama Department of Archives as part of the "[Using Primary Sources in the Classroom](#)" project in 1996.

Lesson 1: The Power of the Press

Background information for teachers:

World War I began in August 1914 between the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary and the Allied Powers of Russia, France, Great Britain, Japan, Serbia, Belgium, and Montenegro. As the Great War spread to encompass much of the world, the United States under President Woodrow Wilson strove to remain neutral. The American public was split on which side to support since its population consisted of many different ethnic groups with conflicting allegiances. A majority simply wanted to stay aloof from a war far away where the issues were often difficult to decipher.

German actions against the interests and citizens of the United States finally decided the issue in favor of the Allies. Repeated submarine attacks by German U-boats took the lives of Americans, events that increasingly stirred the press to demand action to avenge America's honor. Public opinion, already tending toward support of Britain because of historical ties, became convinced that the United States must enter the war "to make the world safe for democracy." The final inducement to intervention came when newspapers published an intercepted message from the German foreign minister. He offered Mexico land in the American southwest in return for attacking the United States. Stirred up by the sometimes rabid prose of the journalists, the public overwhelmingly supported the American declaration of war on Germany that came in April 1917.

Content Standards:

Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies (2010)

- 4th Grade:
 - 11. Describe the impact of World War I on Alabamians, including the migration of African Americans from Alabama to the North and West, utilization of Alabama's military installations and training facilities, and increased production of goods for the war effort.
 - Recognizing Alabama participants in World War I, including Alabama's 167th Regiment of the Rainbow Division
 - Identifying World War I technologies, including airplanes, machine guns, and chemical warfare
- 6th Grade:
 - 3. Identify causes and consequences of World War I and reasons for the United States' entry into the war.
 - Examples: sinking of the Lusitania, Zimmerman Note, alliances,

militarism, imperialism, nationalism

- Describing military and civilian roles in the United States during World War I
 - Explaining roles of important persons associated with World War I, including Woodrow Wilson and Archduke Franz Ferdinand
 - Analyzing technological advances of the World War I era for their impact on modern warfare
 - Examples: machine gun, tank, submarine, airplane, poisonous gas, gas mask
 - Locating on a map major countries involved in World War I and boundary changes after the war
 - Explaining the intensification of isolationism in the United States after World War I
 - Example: reaction of the Congress of the United States to the Treaty of Versailles, League of Nations, and Red Scare
 - Recognizing the strategic placement of military bases in Alabama Grade:
- 11th Grade:
 - 4. Describe causes, events, and the impact of military involvement of the United States in World War I, including mobilization and economic and political changes.
 - Identifying the role of militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism in World War I
 - Explaining controversies over the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the League of Nations
 - Explaining how the Treaty of Versailles led to worsening economic and political conditions in Europe, including greater opportunities for the rise of fascist states in Germany, Italy, and Spain
 - Comparing short- and long-term effects of changing boundaries in pre- and post-World War I in Europe and the Middle East, leading to the creation of new countries

National Standards for History

- Era 7 The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)
 - Standard 1: How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption
 - Standard 2: The changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I
 - Standard 3: How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression:

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Standard 2 – Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy
- Standard 3 – People, Places, and Environments

- Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments
- Standard 5 – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions
- Standard 6 – Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify an editorial.
2. Identify propaganda.
3. Discuss the differences between a weekly and a daily newspaper.
4. Analyze the needs of rural and urban newspaper audiences and discuss how those needs are met.
5. Evaluate the possible power of the press and the importance of multiple views concerning events.

Suggested Activities:

1. Make copies of the newspaper accounts of the sinking of the various vessels for each student.
2. Divide class into six groups.
3. Each student must read each article.
4. Each group has a specific question or point to address for the benefit of the class.
 - a. Group A: After reading the articles, be prepared to describe the nature of each writing. Define the term *editorial*. Are these articles reports of events which have occurred, or are they opinions concerning the events which have occurred? Why is it important to know the difference between those articles which are fact and those which are opinion?
 - b. Group B: Read and describe the newspaper accounts of the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the *Gulflight*. What are the dates of the attacks according to the newspaper articles? Why are both events covered in the May 13 edition? What are the similarities and the differences in the attacks? Locate this county on a map of Alabama. Where is Chatom located in relationship to the larger cities of Alabama? Describe the audience of this newspaper.
 - c. Group C: Define the term *propaganda*. Read the account of the sinking of the *Deutschland*. Is the language in which this article is printed significant? Why or why not? Does this article contain propaganda? Why or why not? Compare the sinking of the *Deutschland* with the destruction of the *Lusitania*. What do these events have in common? How are these events different? Describe the audiences of the two newspapers.

- d. Group D: Read the account of the sinking of the *Missourian*. Is this a significant event? Is there a relationship between the sinking of the *Missourian* and the United States Senate's vote concerning the declaration of war? Why or why not? Describe the audiences of these newspapers. Is there a difference in coverage between the weekly newspaper and the daily newspaper?
- e. Group E: Examine the coverage of the sinking of the *Lusitania* with the coverage given to the sinking of the *Missourian*. What do these events have in common with each other? How do these events differ?
- f. Group F: Read and discuss the coverage of the [Zimmermann note](#) discovery in the *Huntsville Daily Times* and the *Washington County News*. Describe the situation as it was explained by the newspapers. What are the dates for these reports in the newspapers? According to the newspapers, on what date was the note actually intercepted? The U.S. declared war on April 6, 1917. Was the Zimmermann note important to the declaration of war? Why or why not? Are these articles based upon fact or upon opinion? Are editorial remarks made in the articles? Present examples from the articles to prove your positions.

Primary Sources:

[Document 1](#): "1,200 Perished on Lusitania" and "Discuss Gulfight." *Washington County News*, 13 May 1915, 1. Newspapers, Micro #455, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 2](#): "Germans Sink Two More Ships." *Washington County News*, 6 May 1915, 4. Newspapers, Micro #455, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 3](#): "Was the Accident to the Deutschland Really an Accident?" *Alabama Staats-Zeitung*, 9 December 1915, 1. Newspapers, Micro #448, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 4](#): "American Rights Clearly Violated." *Cherokee Harmonizer*, 8 March 1917, 1. Newspapers, Micro #302, Alabama Department of Archive & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 5](#): "U.S. Steamer *Missourian* Sunk Without Warning; Crew Saved" and others. *The Huntsville Daily Times*, 5 April 1917, 1. Newspapers, Micro #300, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 6](#): "United States in War with Germany" and "Unarmed Steamer Sunk." *Washington County News*, 12 April 1917, 1. Newspapers, Micro #455, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 7](#): "Germany Stirs Washington by Proposing Tripple [sic] Attack on U.S. with Mexico and Japan." *The Huntsville Daily Times*, 1 March 1917, 1. Newspapers, Micro #300, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 8](#): "German Plot Against U.S. is Revealed." *Washington County News*, 8 March 1917, 1. Newspapers, Micro #455, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

1,200 PERISHED ON LUSITANIA

SMEAR OF FLOTSAM ON FACE
OF SEA MARKS GRAVE OF
SUNKEN STEAMER.

SURVIVORS TELL OF DISASTER

One Hundred and Forty-nine of 1200
Who Perished Lie In Improvised
Morgue at Queenstown.

London. — Dispatch to the Exchange Telegraph Company from Liverpool says the official list of survivors of the Lusitania includes the names of 487 passengers and 274 crew.

Queenstown.—A smear of flotsam on the face of a calm sea 23 miles from this port marks the grave of the Cunarder Lusitania, victim of a German submarine.

One hundred and forty-nine of the 1200 persons who perished with the liner lie in improvised morgues in old buildings that line the Queenstown harbor. They either were picked up dead or succumbed after land-

ing.

The 645 survivors of the disaster here are quartered in hotels, residences and hospitals, some too badly hurt to be moved. Two groups left here clad in misfit clothing for Dublin by rail and thence by boat to Holy Head. The injuries of some are so serious that additional deaths are expected and nearly all are too dazed to understand fully what has happened.

The survivors do not agree as to whether the submarine fired one or two torpedoes. A few say they saw the periscope and many attest to tracing the wake of the foam as a projectile raced toward the vessel.

The only points in which all concur is that the torpedo struck the vessel a vital blow amidships, causing her to list almost immediately to the starboard. In this careening fashion she plowed forward some distance smashing the left boat's davits as she did so and making the launching of boats well nigh impossible until headway had been ceasued. How far the Lusitania struggled forward after being struck and how long it was before she disappeared beneath the waves are points on which few passengers agree, estimates of the time she remained afloat ranging from 8 to 20 minutes. The list to starboard so elevated life boats on the port side as to render them useless and it is said only two on that side were launched.

The first three, according to the custom of the sea, was filled with wo-

GERMANS SINK TWO MORE SHIPS

BRITISH AND RUSSIAN STEAMERS
ARE SUNK OFF OF THE ENGLISH COAST.

CREWS OF SHIPS SAVED

Submarine War of Broader Scope
Looked For—Anxiety Over German Attack in West

London.—German submarines, which for two weeks had been confining themselves to the North Sea, where they sank several trawlers, again have appeared on the trade routes off the west coasts of Ireland and England, and caught two victims. They were the British steamer *Edale*, sunk off Scilly Islands, and the Russian steamer *Srono*, attacked off the Blasket Islands. Both crews were saved.

That, taken in connection with the warning issued to American travelers on transatlantic liners, doubtless means another attempt with a greater number of submarines to combat the blockade by England. It is announced by the English papers that the admiralty has found a means of dealing with subma-

rines and the people, in view of the latest attacks upon steamers, are awaiting the result with interest.

In face of submarine attacks, Zeppelin raids and the bombardment of Dunkirk, which bring the war closer home, England remains calm as ever. There are some, of course, who feel anxiety over the western battle line, but generally, the feeling is one of optimism based on success with which the allies have withstood former attempts of the Germans to get through to the ports.

The bombardment of Dunkirk which was repeated, and which has resulted in considerable loss of life, has caused many women and children to leave the town. The Germans can repeat the bombardment whenever they desire with the big guns which formerly

were posted on the coast to ward off attacks from the allied fleet and which have been moved toward Nieuport. Still there is confidence that the navy and armies will find a means of dealing with the guns.

On the remainder of the western front, tidings are comparatively quiet, although the French appear to be still on the offensive between the Meuse and the Moselle rivers, the Germans claiming to have repulsed attacks there. Consequently, with the situation at the Dardanelles established, interest has turned again to the eastern front and particularly to the Russian Baltic provinces which are being raided by the Germans.

The extent of this new raid has not

WAS The Accident To The Deutschland Really An Accident?

Or Was It A Well Laid Plot To Destroy The Boat? A Great Number Of
People In New London Seem To Think The Latter Is
The Correct Version Of The Accident.

From the following taken from the New York mail, it would appear as if the accident to the undersea freighter "Deutschland" was not an accident but a well laid plot to destroy the boat. The Mail under date line of New London, Nov. 22. in part says:

With the Deutschland off on her way back to Bremen, this town is beginning to wonder whether the true story will ever be told of that tragic morning in the race when the submersible

trader sent her convoying tug to the bottom with all her crew but one.

It is plain that, the more the townspeople think and hear about the sinking, the less inclined they are to swallow the first brief and off-hand explanations given out.

These early explanations branded the affair an accident brought about by a fiercely rushing tide which caught the T. A. Scott Jr., in its grip and swept her broadside against the

AMERICAN RIGHTS CLEARLY VIOLATED

Sinking Of The Liner Laconia Another
Lusitania Affair In Principle
Though Fewer Lives Lost

WAS SUNK WITHOUT WARNING

Killing Of American Women By Tor-
pedoing Ship Furnishes "Overt
Act," It Is Stated Officially

Washington.—The sinking of the Cu-
narder Laconia by a German subma-
rine was stated officially to constitute
a clear-cut violation of American
rights.

Conclusive official information at the
state department shows that two Amer-
ican women lost their lives, that if
four other Americans among the pas-
sengers and the 14 among the crew
were saved, it was only by good for-
tune, and that the vessel was sunk
without warning in direct defiance of
all the principles for which the United
States has stood.

Consul Frost's reports from the sur-

vivors show that the vessel was struck
by a first torpedo without warning at
10:30 at night, 150 miles off Fastnet.
The engine was stopped as the ship
listed to starboard, wireless calls were
flashed broadcast and six rockets were
sent up. Thirteen boats with passen-
gers and crew got away in a heavy
sea.

About twenty minutes after the first
torpedo, the reports add, and while
some of the boats were still nearby,
a second torpedo was driven into the
vessel, which sank three-quarters of
an hour after the original attack. The
small boats with survivors pitched
about during the long hours of the
night until rescue ships came up. Dur-
ing this time the two American wom-
en, Mrs. Mary E. Hoy and Miss Eliza-
beth Hoy, of Chicago, died of expos-
ure and were buried at sea. There
were several other deaths, not of Amer-
icans.

No further facts are needed by this
government, it was stated officially.
Officials are entirely clear in their be-
lief that Germany has committed the
act which President Wilson has said
it was impossible for him to believe
she would commit.

Ten Lives Lost On Laconia

London. — The Cunard company
gives the following names of the La-
conia's passengers missing and sup-
posed to have been lost:

Mrs. Mary Hoy, Miss Elizabeth Hoy,

U. S. STEAMER MISSOURIAN SUNK WITHOUT WARNING; CREW SAVED

(By the Associated Press)

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 5—The sinking without warning of the unarmed American steamer *Missourian*, which left Genoa April 4th with thirty two Americans among her crew of fifty three, was reported to the state department today by consul general Wilbur at Genoa. The crew was saved.

(By the Associated Press)

NEW YORK, April 5—American steamship *Missourian* owned by the American Hawaiian steamship company line left here March 6th for Italian ports.

WAR VOOTE PROBABLY

AT FIVE O'CLOCK

(By the Associated Press)

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 5—Congress will probably take a vote about 5 o'clock this afternoon on the war resolution.

SENATE VOTES FOR WAR

(By the Associated Press.)

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 5—The U. S. Senate last night voted for war against Germany with only four dissenting votes. LaFollette and Vardaman were among them.

UNARMED STEAMER SUNK.

Missourian With 32 Americans Aboard Is Torpedoed.

Washington—Sinking without warning of the unarmed American steamer *Missourian*, which left Genoa on April 4 with 32 Americans among her crew of 53, was reported to the state department by Consul General Wilbur at Genoa. The crew was saved.

Destruction of two more vessels, one British and one Norwegian, with Americans on board, was reported to the state department by Consul Lathrop of Cardix.

The Norwegian steamer *Sandvikgoole* was sunk by a submarine believed to have been German, while the British steamer *Lincolnshire* was sunk without any submarine being seen.

GERMANY STIRS WASHINGTON BY PROPOSING TRIPPLE ATTACK ON U. S. WITH MEXICO AND JAPAN

(By the Associated Press.)

WASHINGTON D. C. March 1—
—Revelaton of how Germany is ex-
pecting war with the United States
a sresult of her submarine campaign
of ruthlessness and plotted to unite
Mexico and Japan with her for an
attack on the United States has stir-
red the capitol to its depths. How
Germany is confident that unrestrict-
ed submarine war fare is the instru-
ment by which she will bring Eng-
land to her knees proposed as a triple
blow was revealed in set of instruc-
tions from the German foreign minis-
ter Zimmerman to German minister

Von Eckhardt in Mexico City which
was transmitted thru Von Bernstorff.

CONFIRMATION REACHES WASHINGTON

(By the Associated Press)

WASHINGTON D. C. March 1—
— Full official confirmation of Ger-
manys proposal to Mexico of the
alliance with Mexico and Japan to
attack the United States government
is today both at the White House
and the state department.

GERMAN PLOT AGAINST U. S. IS REVEALED

War on America by Alliance of
Mexico and Japan With Teu-
tons Proposed.

WILSON HAS THE EVIDENCE

President Has Copy of Official Instruc-
tions Outlining Details of Conspir-
acy Against Our Government—
Carranza Told to Recon-
quer Texas, Arizona
and New Mexico.

Washington, March 3.—On Friday morning the Western Newspaper Union was enabled to reveal that Germany in planning unrestricted submarine warfare and counting its consequences, proposed an alliance with Mexico and Japan to make war on the United States if this country should not remain neutral.

Japan, through Mexican mediation, was to be urged to abandon her allies

and join in the attack on the United States.

Mexico, for her reward, was to receive general financial support from Germany, reconquer Texas, New Mexico and Arizona—lost provinces—and share in the victorious peace terms Germany contemplated.

Details of the Plot.

Details were left to German Minister von Eckhardt in Mexico City, who by instructions signed by German Foreign Minister Zimmermann at Berlin January 19, 1917, was directed to propose the alliance with Mexico to General Carranza and suggest that Mexico seek to bring Japan into the plot.

These instructions were transmitted to Von Eckhardt through Count von Bernstorff, former German ambassador here, now on his way home to Germany under a safe conduct obtained from his enemies by the country against which he was plotting war.

Pictures World Dominion.

Germany pictured to Mexico by broad intimation England and the entente allies defeated; Germany and her allies triumphant and in world domination by the instrument of unrestricted warfare.

A copy of Secretary Zimmermann's instructions to Von Eckhardt, sent through Von Bernstorff, is in possession of the United States government.

Duplicity Is Exposed.

The document has been in the hands of the government since President Wil-