

Document A: Eugene Debs Speech (Modified)

Comrades, friends and fellow-workers, thank you for this very cordial greeting, this very hearty reception. Three of our most loyal comrades are paying the penalty for their devotion to the cause of the working class. They have come to realize, as many of us have, that it is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe in the world.

Every one of these Wall Street conspirators and would-be murderers claims to be an arch-patriot; every one of them insists that the war is being waged to make the world safe for democracy. What humbug! What rot! What false pretense! These autocrats, these tyrants, these red-handed robbers and murderers, the "patriots," while the men who have the courage to stand face to face with them, speak the truth, and fight for their exploited victims—they are the disloyalists and traitors. If this be true, I want to take my place side by side with the traitors in this fight.

I suggest that we stop a moment to think about the term "landlord." "LANDLORD!" Lord of the Land! The lord of the land is indeed a superpatriot...who owns the earth and tells you that we are fighting this war to make the world safe for democracy—he who profiteers at the expense of the people who have been slain [killed in the war]...It is he, this patriot who is in fact the archenemy of the people; it is he that you need to wipe from power. It is he who is a far greater menace to your liberty and your well-being than the Prussian Junkers [Germans] on the other side of the Atlantic ocean.

Yes, in good time we are going to destroy all enslaving and degrading capitalist institutions and re-create them as free and humanizing institutions. The world is daily changing before our eyes. The sun of capitalism is setting; the sun of socialism is rising.

Vocabulary
conspirators: criminals
autocrats: dictators

Source: Socialist leader Eugene Debs delivered this speech in June 1918. He visited three Socialists who were in prison for opposing the draft, and then spoke across the street from the jail, for two hours. The excerpt above is only a small segment of a much longer speech.

Document C: The Sedition Act (1917) (Modified)

Whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag of the United States, or the uniform of the Army or Navy of the United States into contempt, scorn, contumely, or disrepute, or shall willfully utter, print, write, or publish any language intended to incite, provoke, or encourage resistance to the United States...shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or the imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both.

Source: This is an excerpt from the Sedition Act, signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson in 1917. Along with the Espionage Act, the law limited the rights of Americans. Wilson and the United States Congress created the laws because they feared dissent would harm America's effort to win the war.

Document B: Schenk Pamphlet (Modified)

Assert Your Rights

The Socialist Party says that any officers of the law entrusted with the administration of conscription regulations violate the provisions of the United States Constitution when they refuse to recognize your right to assert your opposition to the draft.

No power was delegated to send our citizens away to foreign shores to shoot up the people of other lands, no matter what may be their internal or international disputes.

To draw this country into the horrors of the present war in Europe, to force the youth of our land into the shambles and bloody trenches of war crazy nations, would be a crime the magnitude of which defies description. Words could not express the condemnation such cold-blooded ruthlessness deserves.

No specious or plausible pleas about a "war for democracy" can cloud the issue. Democracy can not be shot into a nation. It must come spontaneously and purely from within.

To advocate the persecution of other peoples through the fighting of a war is an insult to every good and wholesome American tradition.

You are responsible. You must do your share to maintain, support, and uphold the rights of the people of this country.

In this world crisis where do you stand? Are you with the forces of liberty and light or war and darkness?

Vocabulary
Conscription: military draft
Specious: untrue

Source: Charles Schenk was a Socialist who printed and distributed thousands of anti-war pamphlets in 1917 and 1918 opposing the war. The excerpt above comes from one of his pamphlets.

Document D: Schenck v. United States (Modified)

Opinion delivered by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

The character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done. The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting "Fire!" in a theatre and causing a panic...

The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent...

When a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.

Source: The excerpt above comes from the Supreme Court's majority opinion in Schenck v. United States. Schenck was found guilty of violating the Sedition Act.