**Document A: Eugene V. Debs Speech** (Modified)

*Eugene V. Debs was a founding member of the Industrial Workers of the*

*World (IWW), U.S. presidential candidate of the Socialist Party of America,*

*and one of the most famous American socialists. This excerpt is from a*

*speech he gave across the street from a jail, where he had just visited*

*three socialists who were in prison for opposing the draft.*

Comrades, friends and fellow-workers, . . . 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 the **aristocratic 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 **. . .** tyrants, these red-handed robbers and

murderers, [say they’re] 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 [called] the disloyalists and traitors. If this be true, I want

to take my place side by side with the traitors in this fight. . . .

[He] 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** and mutilated by the thousands, under

pretense of being the great American patriot . . . 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 . . . [Germans]

on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

***Source:*** *Socialist leader Eugene Debs delivered this speech in June 1918.*

**Vocabulary**

aristocratic: upper-class

conspirators: criminals

arch-patriot: great patriot

pretense: attempt to make something that is not

the case appear to be true

slain: killed in battle

**Document B: Schenck Pamphlet** (Modified)

*Charles Schenck was a Socialist who in 1917-1918 printed and distributed*

*more than 15,000 anti-war pamphlets, including some to drafted American*

*men. The excerpt below comes from one of his pamphlets.*

ASSERT YOUR RIGHTS

The Socialist Party says that any officers of the law entrusted with the

administration of **conscription** . . . violate the provisions of the United

States Constitution when they refuse to recognize your right to assert your

opposition to the draft. . . .

To draw this country into the horrors of the present war in Europe, to force

the youth of our land into the . . . bloody trenches of war-crazy nations,

would be a crime the **magnitude** of which defies description. . . .

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?

***Source:*** *“Assert Your Rights,” Charles Schenck, 1917-1918.*

**Vocabulary**

conscription: military draft

magnitude: hugeness

specious: misleading

**Document C: The Sedition Act of 1918** (Modified)

*This is an excerpt from the Sedition Act, signed into law by President*

*Woodrow Wilson in 1918. Along with the Espionage Act, the law shrunk the*

*rights of Americans. Wilson and the United States Congress claimed*

*dissent would harm America's effort to win the war. Congress repealed the*

*act in December 1920, two years after the end of WWI.*

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 . . . 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:*** *The Sedition Act of 1918 was passed by the United States*

*Congress on May 16, 1918.*

**Vocabulary**

utter: say

profane: disrespectful

scurrilous: insulting

incite: stir up

**Document D: *Schenck v. United States*** (Modified)

*The excerpt below comes from the Supreme Court’s unanimous opinion in*

Schenck v. United States, 1919.

OPINION 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:*** *Supreme Court opinion by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.,*

*March 3, 1919.*