Enlist, 1915
Fred Spear, published by Tudor Press

Enlist, 1915

Fred Spear, published by Tudor Press
Boston
Color lithograph
Gift of Mrs. George Batchelder, 1972
M21259

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The British ocean liner, RMS *Lusitania,* was sunk on 7 May 1915 as it departed New York bound for Liverpool. Of the nearly 2,000 people on board, 159 were American. Near Ireland, the captain of the *Lusitania* slowed their course due to fog, and a German submarine (known as a u-boat), shot at the *Lusitania,* which tipped heavily to one side and quickly sank. Most people were unable to reach lifeboats in time, and 1,198 people died. The shocking number of civilian casualties inflamed sentiment in the United States, and swayed the country's intention to enter into the World War.

In his speech, "Peace Without Victory" (1917) President Woodrow Wilson recognized the importance of maintaining open seas that allowed for safe trade and travel:

> And the paths of the sea must alike in law and in fact be free....The free, constant, unthreatened intercourse of nations is an essential part of the process of peace.... Peace cannot be had without concession and sacrifice.[1]

ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fred Spear's 1915 drawing of a drowning mother and child was inspired by a newspaper account of sinking of the *Lusitania.* It also conjures visual references to the Madonna and Child, and the innocence of childhood, now lost through war.

The simple text, "Enlist," points to the purpose of this poster – to encourage young men to avenge the loss of women and children at the hands of the German enemy. Propaganda posters were used widely during the first World War to solicit support, whether political, financial, or personal.

SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS
- Describe this poster. Without any other contextual information, can you tell when this was created? Can you determine to what event it refers? What does this suggest about the nature of poster art and its effectiveness in mass culture?
- Can you suggest any symbols that the artist uses for his message here?
- Why might this be effective in 1915 to gain support for the war, and for young men to enlist?
- Would it be effective today?

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
- Ask students to read President Woodrow Wilson's speech, "Peace Without Victory" (1917). Do they feel that his vision for peace would satisfy the feelings that such posters as Enlist had stirred and driven the U.S. into World War I?
- Ask students to bring in examples of war propaganda from magazines, etc. From whose perspective is the propaganda written or drawn? For what audience? What does the author or writer hope to accomplish with his or her work? How does this compare with *Enlist?*

2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks: USII.6, USII.7

---

1 Woodrow Wilson, "Peace Without Victory" (1917). Available online at: http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/peacewith-outvictory.htm [Viewed 1 November 2006].