

THE LONGWORTH DOCUMENTS

An Exercise in Historical Interpretation

The “**Longworth Documents**” are a series of fictional statements by a fictional character and his fictional colleagues (although some names, situations, and places are “real” for atmosphere). The statements resemble the kinds of evidence an historian might gather from archives, libraries, memoirs, caches of letters, newspaper accounts, and interviews when researching a particular event or person for a book or article. The historian’s task is to evaluate and array the evidence in order to create the most reliable and informative account possible of the person and/or event of interest. The key to this assignment, which this exercise is designed to inculcate, is that history is first and foremost an act of interpretation, as well as of evaluation, testing, and thinking critically about evidence in order to tell a “true” story.

Assignment:

Using the documents given below, construct a 4-5 page (double-spaced) essay that tells Longworth’s “story.” In order to complete your essay successfully, assume the following:

- the documents provided here are all you need to tell the story--no outside research is required;
- the real and fictional people mentioned carry equal weight (though not necessarily in the quality and accuracy of what they have to say or the way their views are presented);
- You must use, account for, or in some way recognize ALL the documents (historians can’t just discount some evidence because it doesn’t “fit in” well or support an argument).
- you don't have to reach an either/or conclusion--you can say (in some way) that the evidence is inconclusive or contradictory;
- toward whatever conclusion you do reach, you must tell only Longworth's story.

This is an exercise of interpretation; there is no right or wrong conclusion! Though a sound essay format should be followed (introduction, supporting evidence, concluding statement), more attention will be paid to how you analyze and integrate the sources and how you support your statements or refute contradictory evidence. Citations of the sources used to tell your story should be provided in the body of the essay using the source number provided; a separate reference section is not necessary (For example: Longworth was a U.S. Senator [16,25]).

Questions or need assistance? Contact Dr. Craig Wollner (503-725-5484 or wollnercr@pdx.edu).

“Honest Jim Longworth” and the War Declaration:

1. New York Call, March 24, 1917, 1:6 [Socialist]. It is common knowledge in Washington that Senator Longworth, that tool of the munitions mongers and Wall Street imperialists, will vote for war.
2. Washington Post, March 26, 1917, 1:6 [Washington correspondent]. Informed sources report that the vote on war in the Senate will hinge on Senator Longworth of New York.
3. New York Herald, March 27, 1917, 6:1 [Columnist Drool Poison]. I have learned from unusually reliable sources that Senator Longworth told Senator Lenroot that he would vote against war out of respect for his deceased mother who was born in Germany.

4. Longworth to Katharine O'Reilly Longworth, March 27, 1917, Longworth Papers, Library of Congress. Dear Mother: Greetings on your ninety-sixth birthday. Don't worry about the hospital bills. I have ample funds to meet them and to see to it that you are buried in your native Dublin.
5. Longworth to Bridget Murphy Longworth, April 1, 1917, Bridget Longworth Papers, New York Public Library. Dear Wife: In our present straits how can we meet the payroll on our Albany farm? If I get turned out by the voters next year, we may all have to go to the poor house. If I offend Tammany Hall by voting for war, my goose is cooked. Kiss Beth for me.
6. Rosie Ribbon [Longworth's secretary] to her mother, April 1, 1917, Ribbon Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. Helen and I are badly pinched this month, so we can't send any money home. That old skinflint Longworth is forcing me to kick back half my salary.
7. Barbara Blabb [Switchboard operator] to mother, April 2, 1917, Jones Papers, Stanford University Library. Dear Mother: Last night Susan Snoop told me that Bessie Bigear told her that three days ago Tammany Boss Flynn called from New York and gave Senator Longworth hell for not coming out for war.
8. Longworth to John Flynn [telegram], April 3, 1917, Flynn Papers, New York Public Library. I have always been grateful for Tammany's support. Rely on me to do whatever is best for the party and country.
9. Senator Robert M. LaFollette to wife, April 1, 1917, LaFollette Papers, University of Wisconsin. Last night Longworth assured our caucus of 13 Senators that he would stand firm against the war declaration.
10. Senator George W. Norris to wife, April 1, 1917, Norris Papers, Library of Congress. Last night Longworth and ten others attended our caucus of Senators, and although he complained about pressures from the Irish, he told us that he would vote for war.
11. Baltimore Sun, April 2, 1917, 1:4. Senator Longworth, in a lengthy interview with Sun reporter, Samuel M. Scoop, said "There is no reason to fight Germany until German submarines begin to attack our ships."
12. J.P. Morgan to Longworth, April 2, 1917 [telegram copy], Morgan Papers, Wall Street Journal Office. If you haven't the guts to vote for war we'll call in our note for \$100,000 and refuse you all further credit.
13. Longworth to J.P. Morgan, April 2, 1917 [telegram], Morgan Papers, Wall Street Journal Office. Have no fear. I am only too grateful for your interest free loan of \$100,000.
14. Bridget Murphy Longworth, ed., Leaves from the Diary of an Honest Senator: James Longworth [privately printed, n.d., n.p.], page 37, April 3, 1917, 10:27 p.m. Here I take pen in hand to write a few pages in my diary. The crisis is approaching on the war vote. Tammany is mightily mistaken if it thinks it can have the slightest influence on me.

15. Diary of James Longworth, Longworth Papers, Library of Congress, April 4, 1917, 8:37 a.m. What a night. The pressures converging on me are terrible. Not a wink of sleep. I must have laryngitis; I can't speak above a whisper.
16. Congressional Record, 65th Congress, 1st Session, page 2634, April 4, 1917 [Final vote in Senate for war; 82 to 6]. Senator Longworth: Mr. President, I want to make it clear here and now that I voted as I did only for the most patriotic motives.
17. Milwaukee Star, April 5, 1917, 6:1 [Editorial]. The vote of that treacherous Longworth can be viewed by right-thinking citizens only with anger.
18. Wall Street Journal, April 5, 1917, 6:0 [Editorial]. Senator Longworth finally came through as all decent citizens had hoped and expected.
19. Page to Lansing [telegram], April 5, 1917, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, page 549. [from London] Pacifists in England condemn Longworth. I fear international incident.
20. James P. Sweep, Sixty Years a White House Janitor, [Boston, 1958], page 7. [as told to Dorothy Drip] I remember as though it were yesterday overhearing President Wilson in the next room say that Postmaster General Burleson had assured him that there would be no more post offices for Longworth unless he lined up for war.
21. Wilson to Burleson [Postmaster General], memorandum April 3, 1917. [in Wilson's handwriting], Wilson Papers, Library of Congress. It does not comport with my principles to use the patronage to beat Senators into line.
22. I Stood Firm: Reminiscences of an Undefiled Senator, James Longworth [New York, 1955], page 392. [distributed gratis by the Longworth Memorial Association]. When the hour came to vote, I rose in the Senate and declared in ringing tones that I acted solely for patriotic motives. I further declared that so well known was the reputation of "Honest Jim" Longworth that no-one had the effrontery to try to pressure me: not Tammany, not the Irish-Americans, not Wall Street, not the White House – nobody.
23. John D. Egghead, "The War Declaration of 1917 Reconsidered in the Light of the Newly Revealed Longworth Papers," American Historical Review, XXXVII [1956], page 549. The evidence is incontrovertible that Longworth double-crossed LaFollette after the Senatorial caucus of April 8, 1917.
24. Robert S. Sullivan, American Diplomatic History [Baltimore, 1956], page 439. Senator Longworth of Wisconsin was clearly the leader of the large pro-German group that cast its votes against the war.
25. Who's Who in America, 1912-1913, pp. 257-258. [Entry under Longworth] Rhodes Scholar, Oxford, 1905-1908; LL.D. Fordham University, 1915; Knights of Columbus.

Evaluating the Evidence:

In order to assist you in evaluating the evidence above and constructing Longworth’s story, in the blank before each statement below (“He” refers to Longworth), insert one of the following: *certainly, almost certainly, probably, possible, clearly not, almost certainly not, probably not, undeterminable.*

You can use these statements to draw conclusions, “array” the evidence, identify conflicting accounts, determine source accuracy and validity, etc. Be sure to note the source(s) above that led to your conclusions about each of these statements (the sources are numbered for convenience) so you can use and cite them in your essay.

- _____ He was a United States Senator.
- _____ He voted for war.
- _____ He represented New York State.
- _____ He was under pressure from Boss Flynn.
- _____ He was a Democrat.
- _____ He absented himself from the voting.
- _____ He was in financial difficulties.
- _____ He voted for purely patriotic reasons.
- _____ He was under pressure from Wall Street.
- _____ He was dishonest.
- _____ He had a national reputation for honesty.
- _____ He was under pressure from the Irish to vote nay.
- _____ He was unconcerned about pressures from Tammany.
- _____ He attended a Senate caucus on March 31, 1917.
- _____ He observed that there were 15 Senators present.
- _____ He promised the caucus to vote against war.
- _____ He explained his vote to the Senate in ringing tones.
- _____ He was up for re-election in 1919.
- _____ He was influenced by his mother’s German nativity.
- _____ He was being subjected to patronage pressure by President Wilson.
- _____ He was being subjected to patronage pressure by Burleson.
- _____ He was the tool of munitions manufacturers.

