



# A Flawed Peace

## MAIN IDEA

**POWER AND AUTHORITY** After winning the war, the Allies dictated a harsh peace settlement that left many nations feeling betrayed.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Hard feelings left by the peace settlement helped cause World War II.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Woodrow Wilson
- Georges Clemenceau
- Fourteen Points
- self-determination
- Treaty of Versailles
- League of Nations

## The Legacy of the War

World War I was, in many ways, a new kind of war. It involved the use of new technologies. It ushered in the notion of war on a grand and global scale. It also left behind a landscape of death and destruction such as was never before seen.

Both sides in World War I paid a tremendous price in terms of human life. About 8.5 million soldiers died as a result of the war. Another 21 million were wounded. In addition, the war led to the death of countless civilians by way of starvation, disease, and slaughter. Taken together, these figures spelled tragedy—an entire generation of Europeans wiped out.

The war also had a devastating economic impact on Europe. The great conflict drained the treasuries of European countries. One account put the total cost of the war at \$338 billion, a staggering amount for that time. The war also destroyed acres of farmland, as well as homes, villages, and towns.

The enormous suffering that resulted from the Great War left a deep mark on Western society as well. A sense of disillusionment settled over the survivors. The insecurity and despair that many people experienced are reflected in the art and literature of the time.

**SETTING THE STAGE** World War I was over. The killing had stopped. The terms of peace, however, still had to be worked out. On January 18, 1919, a conference to establish those terms began at the Palace of Versailles, outside Paris. Attending the talks, known as the Paris Peace Conference, were delegates representing 32 countries. For one year, this conference would be the scene of vigorous, often bitter debate. The Allied powers struggled to solve their conflicting aims in various peace treaties.

## The Allies Meet and Debate

Despite representatives from numerous countries, the meeting's major decisions were hammered out by a group known as the Big Four: [Woodrow Wilson](#) of the United States, [Georges Clemenceau](#) of France, David Lloyd George of Great Britain, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. Russia, in the grip of civil war, was not represented. Neither were Germany and its allies.

**Wilson's Plan for Peace** In January 1918, while the war was still raging, President Wilson had drawn up a series of peace proposals. Known as the **Fourteen Points**, they outlined a plan for achieving a just and lasting peace.

The first four points included an end to secret treaties, freedom of the seas, free trade, and reduced national armies and navies. The fifth goal was the adjustment of colonial claims with fairness toward colonial peoples. The sixth through thirteenth points were specific suggestions for changing borders and creating new nations. The guiding idea behind these points was **self-determination**. This meant allowing people to decide for themselves under what government they wished to live.

Finally, the fourteenth point proposed a “general association of nations” that would protect “great and small states alike.” This reflected Wilson’s hope for an organization that could peacefully negotiate solutions to world conflicts.

**The Versailles Treaty** As the Paris Peace Conference opened, Britain and France showed little sign of agreeing to Wilson’s vision of peace. Both nations were concerned with national security. They also wanted to strip Germany of its war-making power.

The differences in French, British, and U.S. aims led to heated arguments among the nations’ leaders. Finally a compromise was reached. The **Treaty of Versailles** between Germany and the Allied powers was signed on June 28, 1919, five years to the day after Franz Ferdinand’s assassination in Sarajevo. Adopting Wilson’s fourteenth point, the treaty created a **League of Nations**. The league was to be an international association whose goal would be to keep peace among nations.

The treaty also punished Germany. The defeated nation lost substantial territory and had severe restrictions placed on its military operations. As tough as these provisions were, the harshest was Article 231. It was also known as the “war guilt” clause. It placed sole responsibility for the war on Germany’s shoulders. As a result, Germany had to pay reparations to the Allies.

All of Germany’s territories in Africa and the Pacific were declared mandates, or territories to be administered by the League of Nations. Under the peace agreement, the Allies would govern the mandates until they were judged ready for independence.

## A Troubled Treaty

The Versailles treaty was just one of five treaties negotiated by the Allies. In the end, these agreements created feelings of bitterness and betrayal—among the victors and the defeated.

### Vocabulary

*Reparations* is money paid by a defeated nation to compensate for damage or injury during a war.

## History Makers



**Woodrow Wilson**  
1856–1924

Wilson was tall and thin and often in poor health. He suffered from terrible indigestion and sometimes had to use a stomach pump on himself. A scholarly man, Wilson once served as president of Princeton University in New Jersey.

Passionate about international peace, he took on the U.S. Senate after it vowed to reject the Treaty of Versailles. During the political battle, he suffered a stroke that disabled him for the rest of his term.



**Georges Clemenceau**  
1841–1929

The near opposite of Wilson, Clemenceau had a compact physique and a combative style that earned him the nickname “Tiger.” He had worked as a physician and journalist before entering the political arena.

Determined to punish Germany, Clemenceau rarely agreed with Wilson and his larger quest for world peace. He once remarked of Wilson, “He thinks he is another Jesus Christ come upon earth to reform men.”



**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps**

- 1. Region** Which Central Powers nation appears to have lost the most territory?
- 2. Location** On which nation's former lands were most of the new countries created?

**The Creation of New Nations** The Western powers signed separate peace treaties in 1919 and 1920 with each of the other defeated nations: Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. These treaties, too, led to huge land losses for the Central Powers. Several new countries were created out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were all recognized as independent nations.

The Ottoman Turks were forced to give up almost all of their former empire. They retained only the territory that is today the country of Turkey. The Allies carved up the lands that the Ottomans lost in Southwest Asia into mandates rather than independent nations. Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan came under British control; Syria and Lebanon went to France.

Russia, which had left the war early, suffered land losses as well. Romania and Poland both gained Russian territory. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, formerly part of Russia, became independent nations.

**“A Peace Built on Quicksand”** In the end, the Treaty of Versailles did little to build a lasting peace. For one thing, the United States—considered after the war to be the dominant nation in the world—ultimately rejected the treaty. Many Americans objected to the settlement and especially to President Wilson’s League of Nations. Americans believed that the United States’ best hope for peace was to stay out of European affairs. The United States worked out a separate treaty with Germany and its allies several years later.

The Treaty of Versailles: Major Provisions			
League of Nations	Territorial Losses	Military Restrictions	War Guilt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International peace organization; enemy and neutral nations initially excluded</li> <li>Germany and Russia excluded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Germany returns Alsace-Lorraine to France; French border extended to west bank of Rhine River</li> <li>Germany surrenders all of its overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limits set on the size of the German army</li> <li>Germany prohibited from importing or manufacturing weapons or war material</li> <li>Germany forbidden to build or buy submarines or have an air force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sole responsibility for the war placed on Germany’s shoulders</li> <li>Germany forced to pay the Allies \$33 billion in reparations over 30 years</li> </ul>
<p><b>SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts</b></p> <p>1. <b>Analyzing Issues</b> <i>In what ways did the treaty punish Germany?</i></p> <p>2. <b>Clarifying</b> <i>What two provinces were returned to France as a result of the treaty?</i></p>			

In addition, the treaty with Germany, in particular the war-guilt clause, left a legacy of bitterness and hatred in the hearts of the German people. Other countries felt cheated and betrayed by the peace settlements as well. Throughout Africa and Asia, people in the mandated territories were angry at the way the Allies disregarded their desire for independence. The European powers, it seemed to them, merely talked about the principle of national self-determination. European colonialism, disguised as the mandate system, continued in Asia and Africa. **A**

Some Allied powers, too, were embittered by the outcome. Both Japan and Italy, which had entered the war to gain territory, had gained less than they wanted. Lacking the support of the United States, and later other world powers, the League of Nations was in no position to take action on these and other complaints. The settlements at Versailles represented, as one observer noted, “a peace built on quicksand.” Indeed, that quicksand eventually would give way. In a little more than two decades, the treaties’ legacy of bitterness would help plunge the world into another catastrophic war.