

The Great War Ends

A final showdown on the Western Front began in early 1918. The Germans badly wanted to achieve a major victory before eager American troops arrived in Europe.

Final Offensives In March 1918, the Germans launched a huge offensive on the Western Front with troops newly freed from fighting in Russia. By July, the spring offensive had driven the Allies back 40 miles, the biggest German breakthrough in three years. The rapid push exhausted the German forces and cost heavy casualties.

By then, fresh American troops were pouring into the Western Front. The Allies launched a counter-offensive, slowly driving German forces back through France and Belgium. In September, German generals told the Kaiser that the war could not be won.

Germany Asks for Peace Uprisings exploded among hungry city dwellers across Germany. German commanders advised the kaiser to step down. William II did so in early November, fleeing into exile in the Netherlands.

By autumn, Austria-Hungary was also reeling toward collapse. As the government in Vienna tottered, the subject nationalities revolted, splintering the

The Costs of World War I

COUNTRY	ALLIES				CENTRAL POWERS	
	RUSSIA	BRITISH EMPIRE	FRANCE	UNITED STATES	GERMANY	AUSTRIA-HUNGARY
MOBILIZED FORCES	12,000,000	8,904,467	8,410,000	4,355,000	11,000,000	7,800,000
KILLED	1,700,000	908,371	1,357,800	116,516	1,773,700	1,200,000
WOUNDED	4,950,000	2,090,212	4,266,000	204,002	4,216,058	3,620,000
PRISONERS AND MISSING	2,500,000	191,652	537,000	4,500	1,152,800	2,200,000
TOTAL CASUALTIES	9,150,000	3,190,235	6,160,800	323,018	7,142,558	7,020,000
CASUALTY RATE	76%	36%	73%	7%	65%	90%
FINANCIAL COSTS	\$25 billion	\$55 billion	\$48 billion	\$32 billion	\$60 billion	\$22 billion

SOURCE: *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy; *The Great War*, www.pbs.org.

>> World War I ended in 1918, but its human and economic costs would be felt for decades. Many nations had thrown all their resources into the fight, and their losses were staggering.

empire of the Hapsburgs. Bulgaria and the Ottoman empire also asked for peace.

The new German government sought an **armistice**, or agreement to end fighting, with the Allies. At 11 A.M. on November 11, 1918, the Great War at last came to an end.

The Human Toll The human and material costs of the war were staggering. More than 8.5 million men had died in battle. More than twice that number had been wounded, many of them disabled for life. Historians estimate that at least 6 million civilians also lost their lives as a result of the war.

The devastation was made even worse in 1918 by a deadly **pandemic** of influenza. A pandemic is the spread of a disease across a large area—in this case, the whole world. In just a few months, the flu killed more than 20 million people worldwide.

The Economic Toll In battle zones from France to Russia, homes, farms, factories, roads, and churches had been shelled into rubble. People had fled these areas as refugees. Now they had to return and start to rebuild. The costs of reconstruction and paying off huge war debts would burden an already battered world.

Shaken and disillusioned, people everywhere felt bitter about the war. The Allies blamed the conflict

on their defeated foes and insisted that the losers make **reparations**, or payments for war damage. The stunned Central Powers, who had viewed the armistice as a cease-fire rather than a surrender, looked for scapegoats on whom they could blame their defeat.

The Political Toll Under the stress of war, governments had collapsed in Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman empire. Political **radicals**, or people who wanted to make extreme changes, dreamed of building a new social order from the chaos. Conservatives warned against the spread of Bolshevism, or communism, as it was soon called.

Unrest also swept through Europe's colonial empires. African and Asian soldiers had discovered that the imperial powers were not as invincible as they seemed. Colonial troops returned home with a more cynical view of Europeans and renewed hopes for independence.

? GENERATE EXPLANATIONS Why might the war cause an economic recession or depression in Europe?

Making the Peace

Just weeks after the war ended, President Wilson boarded a steamship bound for France. He had decided to go in person to Paris, where Allied leaders would make the peace. Wilson was certain that he could bring a “just peace” to the world. “Tell me what is right,” Wilson urged his advisors, “and I’ll fight for it.”

To a weary, angry world, Wilson seemed a symbol of hope. His talk of democracy and self-determination raised expectations for a just and lasting peace—even in defeated Germany. Sadly, it would not be that easy. Europe was a shattered continent. Its problems, and those of the world, would not be solved for many years afterward.

Allies Have Conflicting Goals The victorious Allies met at the Paris Peace Conference to discuss the fate of Europe, the former Ottoman empire, and various colonies around the world. The Central Powers and Russia, under its new communist government, were not allowed to take part in the negotiations.

Wilson was one of three strong leaders who dominated the Paris Peace Conference. He was a dedicated reformer and at times was so stubbornly convinced that he was right that he could be hard to

work with. Wilson urged for “peace without victory” based on the Fourteen Points.

Two other Allied leaders at the peace conference had different aims. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George had promised to build a postwar Britain “fit for heroes”—a goal that would cost money. The chief goal of the French leader, Georges Clemenceau (KLEM un soh), was to weaken Germany so that it could never again threaten France. “Mr. Wilson bores me with his Fourteen Points,” complained Clemenceau. “Why, God Almighty has only ten!”

Obstacles to Settlement Crowds of other representatives circled around the “Big Three” with their own demands. Among the most difficult issues were the secret agreements made by the Allies during the war. Italy had signed one such treaty. The Italian prime minister, Vittorio Orlando (awr LAN doh), insisted that the Allies honor their secret treaty to give former Austro-Hungarian lands to Italy. Such agreements often violated the idea of self-determination.

Self-determination posed other problems. Many people who had been ruled by Russia, Austria-Hungary, or the Ottoman empire now demanded national states of their own. The territories claimed by these peoples often overlapped, so it was impossible to satisfy them all. Some ethnic groups became unwanted minorities in newly created states.

Wilson had to compromise on his Fourteen Points. However, he stood firm on his goal of creating an international League of Nations. The League would be based on the idea of **collective security**, a system in which a group of nations acts as one to preserve the peace of all. Wilson felt sure that the League could correct any mistakes made in Paris.

The Treaty of Versailles In June 1919, the Allies ordered representatives of the new German Republic to sign the treaty they had drawn up at the palace of Versailles (vur sy) outside Paris. The German delegates were horrified. The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to assume full blame for causing the war.

It also imposed huge reparations that would burden an already damaged German economy. The reparations covered not only the destruction caused by the war, but also pensions for millions of Allied soldiers or their widows and families. The total cost of German reparations would come to over \$400 billion in today’s money.


Other parts of the treaty were aimed at weakening Germany. The treaty severely limited the size of the once-feared German military. It returned Alsace and Lorraine to France, removed hundreds of square miles of territory from western and eastern Germany, and



>> In this cartoon, President Wilson says to the dove, “Here’s your olive branch. Now get busy.” **Analyze Political Cartoons** Does the cartoonist think Wilson’s solution will work?



>> **Analyze Maps** Based on this map and the text, why were many Germans unhappy with the territorial changes that occurred after World War I?

 **Interactive Map**

stripped Germany of its overseas colonies. The treaty compelled many Germans to leave the homes they had made in Russia, Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, and the German colonies to return to Germany or Austria.

The Germans signed because they had no choice. However, German resentment of the Treaty of Versailles would poison the international climate for 20 years. It would help spark an even deadlier world war in the years to come.

? COMPARE POINTS OF VIEW How did the goals of the Big Three Leaders—Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau—conflict?

Effects of the Peace Settlements

The Allies drew up separate treaties with the other Central Powers. These treaties redrew the map of Eastern Europe and affected colonial peoples around the globe. Like the Treaty of Versailles, these treaties left widespread dissatisfaction.

New Nations in Europe A key principle of Wilson's Fourteen Points was self-determination. This goal helped a band of new nations emerge in Eastern Europe

where the German, Austrian, and Russian empires had once ruled.

Poland became an independent nation after more than 100 years of foreign rule. The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia fought for and achieved independence. Three new republics—Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary—rose in the old Hapsburg heartland. In the Balkans, the peacemakers created a new South Slav state, Yugoslavia, dominated by Serbia.

Despite the settlement, Eastern Europe remained a center of political conflict and unrest. The new nations were also relatively poor, with agricultural economies and little capital for industry.

The Mandate System European colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific had looked to the Paris Peace Conference with high hopes. Nationalist leaders in these regions expected that the peace would bring new respect and an end to imperial rule. They took up Wilson's call for self-determination.

However, the leaders at Paris applied self-determination only to parts of Europe. Outside Europe, the victorious Allies added to their overseas empires.

The treaties created a system of **mandates**, territories administered by Western powers. Britain and France gained mandates over German colonies in Africa. Japan and Australia were given mandates over some Pacific islands. The treaties handled lands that



>> Delegates attend the first meeting of the League of Nations on December 4, 1920, in the Hall of Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland.

used to be part of the Ottoman empire as if they were colonies, too.

In theory, mandates were to be held until they were able to stand alone. In practice, they became colonies, remaining under the political and economic control of the Allied powers. From Africa to the Middle East and across Asia, people living in the mandates felt betrayed by the peacemakers.

Widespread Discontent Germans and colonial peoples were not the only groups dissatisfied by the peace. Italy was angry because it did not get all the lands promised in its secret treaty with the Allies. Japan protested the refusal of the Western powers to recognize its claims in China. At the same time, China was forced to accept Japanese control over some former German holdings. Russia, excluded from the peace talks, resented the reestablishment of a Polish nation and three independent Baltic states on lands that had been part of the Russian empire.

All of these discontented nations bided their time. They waited for a chance to revise the peace settlements in their favor.

The League of Nations The Paris Peace Conference did offer one beacon of hope with the establishment of the League of Nations. More than 40 nations joined the League. They agreed to negotiate disputes rather than resort to war and to take common action against any aggressor state.

Wilson's dream had become a reality, or so he thought. On his return from Paris, Wilson faced resistance from his own Senate.

Some Republican senators, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, wanted to restrict the treaty so that the United States would not be obligated to fight in future wars. Lodge's reservations echoed the feelings of many war-weary Americans. Wilson would not accept Lodge's compromises. In the end, the Senate refused to ratify the treaty, and the United States never joined the League.

The loss of the United States weakened the League's power. In addition, the League had no power outside of its member states. As time soon revealed, the League could not prevent war. Still, it was a first step toward something genuinely new—an international organization dedicated to maintaining peace and advancing the interests of all peoples.

? DRAW CONCLUSIONS How did the refusal of the United States to join the League of Nations weaken the League's power?

ASSESSMENT

- 1. Identify Cause and Effect** How did World War I affect the role of women in society?
- 2. Analyze Context** Why did it take so long for the United States to enter World War I?
- 3. Make Generalizations** How does a long war with a high number of casualties generally affect civilians' and soldiers' opinions of their government?
- 4. Compare and Contrast** After World War I, why were conditions ripe for social and political change in Russia, but not in the United States?
- 5. Predict Consequences** How might the harsh provisions of the Treaty of Versailles affect conditions in Germany?