

# After World War I, Nations Were Changed Forever

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German Johannes Bell signs the Treaty of Versailles in France. He is shown sitting in the front chair. The treaty had been drafted by the Allied powers and was unfavorable and harsh for Germany. Image from the public domain

World War I was larger than any war that came before it. It was fought between two sides. The winners were Britain, France, Russia, Italy and the United States. The powers that lost were Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was based in today's Turkey, while the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied the center of Europe.

The war was fought 100 years ago and caused the deaths of millions of people. It left Europe and the world greatly changed. It also set the stage for World War II and many of the horrors that came with it.

## A new great power



THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

World War I changed the United States in two important ways. First, it turned the U.S. army into a large, modern fighting force. For the first time, the United States became a match for even the greatest European power.

Second, the war made the United States a much greater economic force, too. Many of the countries in Europe were broken and tired because of the war. This allowed the United States to control much more of the world's trade and business. The country quickly grew richer than it had ever been.

### The rise of communism and socialism

World War I greatly weakened Russia. Before the war ended, communist revolutionaries took over the government, and Russia's king, the czar, was killed. This was called the Russian Revolution. Communists, led by Vladimir Lenin, did not want a few people to own all the factories and land as property. They had the government take over those lands instead.



Germany also formed a new government. It was called the Weimar Republic, and it mixed democracy with socialism. Germans could now vote for their leaders in the government. Socialism was less extreme than communism because it did not get rid of private property. But Germany's new government soon came under great pressure. In the end, it was toppled by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party. With Hitler in power, the stage for World War II was set.

### Nationalism transforms Europe



The German, Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires fell apart. New countries were formed in Europe, in part due to nationalism.

Nationalism is the idea that people with the same culture have the right to their own separate country. After the war, many people wanted to break from the old empires and form their own nations. But nationalism also caused many problems, especially in Eastern Europe. Many countries had more than one culture and race. Nationalism led to hatred and fighting between these various groups.

## The myths of victory and failure



At the end of World War I, the German General Erich Ludendorff wanted Germany to refuse the peace treaty. This treaty, or deal, was written by the winners of the war, and Germany saw it as very unfair. Ludendorff said the army could still fight on. But the new German government wanted peace, so it declared the war over.

This decision gave Ludendorff and other German military leaders someone to blame for Germany's defeat. This started the idea that the German army could have won, but was "stabbed in the back" by socialists and the government. This idea weakened the power of the Weimar Republic. In the end, it allowed Adolf Hitler to rise to power.

Britain was also greatly changed by the war. Its suffering was so great that it wanted to avoid another war at all costs. That made it give in to Hitler when he wanted to grab new territories for Germany. This was called appeasement. But as this went on, World War II became more and more certain.

## A "lost generation"



Eight million people died during World War I. Many others were so badly hurt by the war that they took their own lives. In much of Europe, it was hard to find someone who had not lost a loved one to the war.



**Quiz**

- 1 Examine the map in the section "Nationalism transforms Europe" and read the selection below.

*Nationalism is the idea that people with the same culture have the right to their own separate country. After the war, many people wanted to break from the old empires and form their own nations.*

How does the map support the information in the selection above?

- (A) by showing that winning countries were not affected by nationalism
  - (B) by outlining the smaller countries that formed because of nationalism
  - (C) by showing that there were few free cities in the old empires
  - (D) by outlining the locations of Germany and Austria-Hungary
- 2 Look at the images at the top of the article and in the section "The myths of victory and failure."

What do the images show about Germany after World War I?

- (A) Some German leaders were unhappy with the peace treaty.
- (B) Most German leaders tried to get along with other countries.
- (C) Some German leaders decided to keep fighting other countries.
- (D) Most German leaders signed the peace treaty.

- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "A new great power."

*Second, the war made the United States a much greater economic force, too. Many of the countries in Europe were broken and tired because of the war. This allowed the United States to control much more of the world's trade and business. The country quickly grew richer than it had ever been.*

Which of the following is the MOST accurate explanation of this paragraph?

- (A) The United States could not trade with countries that had lost the war in Europe after the war.
- (B) The United States did not have much money until it was able to begin trading with Europe after the war.
- (C) The United States used its business and trade to help other rich countries that were tired from the war.
- (D) The United States was able to become richer because other wealthy countries were weak from the war.

- 4 Read the section "The rise of communism and socialism."

Which sentence from the section shows WHY communists wanted to change the government in Russia?

- (A) Before the war ended, communist revolutionaries took over the government, and Russia's king, the czar, was killed.
- (B) Communists, led by Vladimir Lenin, did not want a few people to own all the factories and land as property.
- (C) They had the government take over those lands instead.
- (D) Socialism was less extreme than communism because it did not get rid of private property.