A World In Flames: How And French Hatred Led To WW I

At the turn of the century, the world was dramatically changing in almost every aspect. The world was becoming one of civilization, laws, and order. Many important discoveries made in the early 1900s made this time truly wondrous to be alive. Steamships, affordable cars, and electricity were becoming the new societal norms. People were now enjoying new luxuries that were once thought not possible. However, this era of good feelings would soon come to an end, as a wave of senseless hatred, violence, and fighting would soon ensue. The nations of Britain and France would soon make blunders so large that their ripples altered the course of history forever and ultimately caused two world wars.

When tensions broke out in Europe after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by Slavic Nationalists called the Black Hand, the entire world halted. The Austro-Hungarian empire blamed the nation of Serbia for the assassination, even though the Black Hand was not connected in any way to the Serbian government. On July 31, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on the Serbians, setting off the first domino in a massive chain of anger, blame, and misplaced hatred. This chain reaction, in part, is due to the intertwining web of alliances that were in place at the time. The Triple Alliance, consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, would soon come to blows with the Triple Entente (Britain, Russia, and France), who supported the Serbs. Soon, the Russians mobilized their army against the Serbs, which prompted Germany to declare war on Russia and France. Germans then began mobilizing to attack France through Belgium, a plan designed by General Schlieffen, to achieve swift victory. The promised to defend Belgium, and therefore declared war on Germany in 1914 to protect their-Belgian ports. Other nations, such as the Ottoman Empire, Australia and New Zealand (ANZACS), took up sides and came to the aid of the two alliances. This conflict would come to be known as World War I, and was the largest war the world had ever seen up until this point. The First Battle of the Marne was a direct result of the Schlieffen plan, and soon the Germans would clash with the French and in the fields of France. 1.4 million Germans and about 1 million French and soldiers took place in this battle, in which both sides sustained heavy casualties. The Germans suffered around 220,000 dead or wounded, while the Allies had 263,000 wounded and 81,000 casualties. The First Battle of the Marne was an extremely violent battle, but it was a decisive victory for the Allies.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, America was in a very good position with their economy. Following the decline of the West, America was bent on becoming more industrial and building up civilization. The last of the western outlaw gangs had been either disbanded or completely wiped out. America now had a booming economy that thrived on steel, coal, and other natural resources. Cities were now being focal points for work and living, and country life seemed out of date. This shift in the economy entered America in a Golden Age of inventions and civilization, in which they did not want to leave willingly. The United States was quick to declare neutrality in the war due to their booming economy, but some people were still sympathetic for the allied powers. Strong cultural ties to England, as well as them being our biggest trade partner pushed America to help them out. President Woodrow Wilson approved the United States to begin sending exported aid to the allied powers to support them. Exports to Britain and France grew 365%, consisting of nearly 2.75 billion dollars. America also decreased it’s trading with Germany by 90%, which hurt the German economy. This move by Wilson

angered the Germans, causing German aggression to increase. In 1915, a German U-boat fired on liner Lusitania 11 miles off the southern coast of Ireland. This attack killed 1,198 people, with 128 of them being Americans. These actions pushed Wilson to break diplomatic ties with Berlin, and the mentality of both America and Germany slowly began to change. Tensions began to rise when in 1917, German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman sent a telegram to Mexico offering aid in reclaiming their land if they declared war on America. This telegram was intercepted by intelligence and promptly sent to the United States. This message was taken very seriously due to the poor relationship with Mexico. After this, Wilson pushed for American merchant ships to be armed, but this action was too late as several American boats were sunk by U-Boats.

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson stepped before Congress with a motion for a call to arms. Congress agreed by a landslide and on April 6, declared war on Germany. General John J. Pershing was selected to be the leader of the independent American Expeditionary Force. American troops did not land in France until late in June and were ill-prepared for the horrors of the Great War. The war was one of the most violent and deadly wars of history, and was sort of a free for all, with countries eagerly trying out new and experimental weaponry on each other and finding new ways to kill the enemy. World War I saw the use of armed zeppelins, armored trains, mustard gas, flamethrowers, tanks, biplanes, soldiers wielding flamethrowers, and even the first automatic guns for infantry. Trench warfare was often gruesome and violent, with soldiers having to rush into the barbed wire-body ridden No-Man's Land. However, the sheer number of American troops fresh from home tipped the war in the Allies favor and the "Doughboys" overcame the horrors. Near 1918, both the Germans and the other Allies were virtually exhausted from years of fighting and resource deprivation. The previous years of fighting had resulted in catastrophic losses of soldiers of both armies. Battles such as the Battle of Verdun, and the Somme had nearly resulted in the complete collapse of the French army and the Germans claiming victory over the Western Front, but it cost them dearly. Both sides were starting to reach a stalemate and were tired of fighting. Thus the United States' entry into the war played a large role in the Allies winning. It was in this atmosphere that Germany suffered heavy defeats in the Second Battle of the Marne, and the Argonne forest, after which they accepted defeat and signed the peace armistice on November 11, 1918.

After the end of World War One, it was left to the major allies to decide the fate of a defeated Germany. The decision was left in the hands of leader David Lloyd George, French leader Georges Clemenceau, and United States President Woodrow Wilson. All three of these leaders had very different ideas on how to handle Germany, and they did not agree on much at all--especially on punishment.

President Woodrow Wilson's idea was to help provide a peace plan for the world with his Fourteen Points. This provided a structural framework in which to work peace off of. Wilson's first five points consisted of diplomacy, freedom of the seas, lower tariffs on goods, reductions in armaments and weaponry, and the decolonization of empires. The following eight points insisted on evacuating troops from Russia, Belgium, and France. These points sought to restore peace and justice to the world that had been plunged into chaos. The most important point that Wilson proposed was the idea of a League of Nations. This L.O.N would ensure that countries could talk peacefully about things and sort issues out. This was a precursor to the United Nations that we have today. U.S. involvement in the League, however, was limited because of Wilson's deteriorating health and the Senate rejected United States membership.

While Wilson's Fourteen Points sounded like an amazing way to de-escalate the tensions, they were rejected by Britain and France; both of which thought that it was too lenient and not harsh enough on Germany. Georges Clemenceau was absolutely furious that the Germans had torn his country apart and marched on his land for so long, and he wanted absolute revenge. Clemenceau pushed for Germany to have to pay massive amounts of monetary reparations to the allies--money that they did not have. Clemenceau not only wanted the Germans to pay off the damage that they caused, but for the other enemy powers as well. Georges did not care about the other enemy countries paying, for he just sought to see Germany crippled and have to pay for its allies. . ("Aims of the Big Three")

While leader David Lloyd George did not agree with France's demands, he agreed to back up Clemenceau because he knew that it was what the enraged citizens wanted. While he thought that Germany should be treated fairer, he did not dare to speak up in his own interests and anger his citizens, and therefore went right along with Clemenceau and France. Together, they came up with the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was extremely unfair to the Germans, for it put them so far in debt that their money became virtually worthless. They were forced to give up all of their overseas colonies, the German army was forced to reduce to just 100,000 men, soldiers were banned from the Rhineland, and they were not allowed to have an air force, tanks, and very few battleships. The most humiliating thing, however, was that Germany was not even invited to the conference in which the treaty was discussed and agreed upon.

As a result, the German Great Depression was now in full swing. The Weimar government had been forced to give so much money to Britain and France that they physically did not have enough to meet the demands. To try and combat this, the Weimar simply printed more money. This proved to be catastrophic, however, because it only lowered the price of the now abundant German mark to new levels. German citizens were now having to bring entire wheelbarrows full of marks just to buy a simple loaf of bread ("German Economy 1920s"). During winter, many people burned the marks in their fireplaces or trash cans just to stay warm. The entirety of the country was now dirt poor and starving ("Weimar Republic"). When all hope seemed lost, a new group called the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' party) started to gain power. Their leader, a young man named Adolf Hitler, was gaining popularity all throughout Germany. Hitler was an extremely charismatic and effective speaker that could rile crowds up with his speeches in a heartbeat. He also was a decorated veteran of World War One, which made him both likable and sympathized with by many citizens of Germany, as they saw him as a figurehead for their frustrations. By January 1933, Hitler was appointed German chancellor by the leader of the Weimar Republic, Paul von Hindenburg. Shortly after, the Nazis were the largest party in the government, and they started to oust all opposition. Hitler's Gestapo, or the secret police, would often stand by the voting polls and threaten people to vote for Nazi candidates or face beatings. Soon, Hitler had effectively taken over all aspects of the Weimar government, in which he called an embarrassment and failure to Germans everywhere. After the death of Hindenburg, Hitler declared himself as the sole Fuhrer of Germany; a title of which included the former positions of president, chancellor, and head of the military. Adolf Hitler was now the sole ruler of what he called the "Third Reich", and he gave many more passionate speeches that secured his title with the German populous.

Almost immediately after his securing of the title of Fuhrer, Hitler began making drastic changes to the Reich. Deportation and persecution of Jews became a common occurrence, as Hitler believed that they were greedy, selfish, and hoarding wealth that could help the German people bounce back from the depression. He also believed that they were criminals that would attack

Christians if provoked. Finally, Hitler blamed the Jews for the defeat of Germany in World War One. He believed that they were not patriotic and didn't fight because they hated Germany. Above all else, however, Hitler blamed the French and for Germany's downfall. In many speeches, Hitler stated that the Treaty of Versailles was the worst embarrassment that Germany had ever seen and that they should not abide by the same rules that their previous, failing Weimar government did. Hitler used this cry to drum up a sense of nationalism and hatred for the Allies that gave him the support he needed to mobilize Germany ("Resentment Towards Treaty") Soon, German forces were occupying the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and many more nations that were once under the control of the Reich. They achieved this by building up the Wehrmacht (Army), Kriegsmarine (Navy), and the Luftwaffe (Air Force). While the buildup was slow at first, the resources gained from small conquered regions funded the Nazi war machine and allowed it to grow ever larger.

While the world saw this unfolding, it did not think much of it. Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of the time, thought it perfectly reasonable for the Germans to want the land they had stolen from them. He began putting forth the idea of appeasement and giving in to Hitler's demands as to avoid another war. While this worked at first, Hitler began to take more and more land than what he initially wanted. Still, Chamberlain did not wish to get involved until Hitler invaded Poland, in which France, Britain, and the Soviet Union declared war on Germany. ("World War Two-Causes")

In short, the Second World War could have been prevented if Britain and France had not been so greedy and wrathful at the conclusion of World War One. The unjust Treaty of Versailles that they created and forced upon Germany without even inviting them to the negotiation tables set off a bad chain reaction of events that led to a perfect storm of toxicity that allowed for the Nazi party to rise in. Had Britain and France simply listened to President Woodrow Wilson and allowed Germany to make small payments while we helped them get back on their feet, it is likely that World War Two would have been prevented altogether. The hatred built up between Germany and the French/ lasted throughout both World Wars, and was the driving force behind the German war machine to defeat the Allies. 'We shall not capitulate… no never. We may be destroyed, but if we are, we shall drag a world with us… a world in flames'-- Adolf Hitler.

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