

1.3: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919

October 27, 2015

1.3 The student will be expected to draw upon primary and/or secondary sources to demonstrate an understanding of the peace process ending World War I.

1.3.1 Summarize Wilson's Fourteen Points. (k)

1.3.2 Analyze French and British objectives at the Paris Peace Conference. (a)

1.3.3 Summarize the main terms of the Treaty of Versailles. (k)

1.3.5 Explain the purpose for creating the League of Nations. (a)

1. Define the following concepts using your textbook glossary

Collective security: _____

Fourteen Points: _____

Reparations: _____

Demilitarized Zone: _____

Treaty of Versailles: _____

The Paris Peace Conference, 1919

As soon as the Paris Peace Conference began, there was disagreement about what the conference was aiming to do.

- Some felt that the aim was to punish Germany
- Others felt that the aim was to cripple Germany so that it could not start another war
- Many felt that the point of the Conference was to reward the winning countries
- Others believed that the aim of the Conference

1 If you had been there to advise the Big Three, in what order of priority would you put the four aims described on the right?

The aims of the leaders at the Paris Peace Conference

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- Many felt that the point of the Conference was to reward the winning countries.
- Others believed that the aim of the Conference should be to establish a just and lasting peace.

PROFILE

Georges Clemenceau
(Prime Minister of France)



Background

- ★ Born 1841 (he was aged 77 when the Paris Conference began).
- ★ First entered French politics in 1871.
- ★ Was Prime Minister from 1906 to 1909. From 1914 to 1917 he was very critical of the French war leaders. In November 1917 he was himself elected to lead France through the last years of the war.

Character

A hard, tough politician with a reputation for being uncompromising. He had seen his country invaded twice by the Germans, in 1870 and in 1914. He was determined not to allow such devastation ever again.

FOCUS TASK

What were the aims of the Big Three at the Paris Peace Conference?

Using the information and sources on pages 80–83, draw up a chart like the one below summarising the aims of the three leaders at the Paris Peace Conference.

NB Leave the fifth column blank. You will need it for a later task.

Leader	Country	Attitude towards Germany	Main aim	

Georges Clemenceau (France)

France had suffered enormous damage to its land, industry, people – and self-confidence. Over two-thirds of the men who had served in the French army had been killed or injured. The war affected almost an entire generation. By comparison, Germany seemed to many French people as powerful and threatening as ever.

Ever since 1870, France had felt threatened by its increasingly powerful neighbour, Germany. The war increased this feeling. German land and industry had not been as badly damaged as France's. France's population was in decline compared to Germany's. Clemenceau and other French leaders saw the Treaty as an opportunity to cripple Germany so that it could not attack France again. The French President (Poincaré) even wanted Germany broken up into a collection of smaller states, but Clemenceau knew that the British and Americans would not agree to this. Clemenceau was a realist and knew he would probably be forced to compromise on some issues. However, he had to show he was aware of public opinion in France. He demanded a treaty that would weaken Germany as much as possible.

Woodrow Wilson (USA)

Wilson has often been seen as an idealist whose aim was to build a better and more peaceful world from the ruins of the Great War. This is partially true, but Wilson did believe that Germany should be punished. However, he also believed that the treaty with Germany should not be too harsh. His view was that if Germany was treated harshly, some day it would recover and want revenge. Wilson's main aim was to strengthen democracy in the defeated nation so that its people would not let its leaders cause another war.

He believed that nations should co-operate to achieve world peace. In January 1918 he published his Fourteen Points to help achieve this. The most important for Wilson was the fourteenth. In this he proposed the setting up of an international body called the League of Nations.

He also believed in self-determination (the idea that nations should rule themselves rather than be ruled by others). He wanted the different peoples of eastern Europe (for example, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks) to rule themselves rather than be part of Austria–Hungary's empire.

PROFILE

Woodrow Wilson
(President of the USA)

**Background**

- ★ Born 1856.
- ★ Became a university professor.
- ★ First entered politics in 1910.
- ★ Became President in 1912 and was re-elected in 1916.

Character

An idealist, and a reformer. As President, he had campaigned against corruption in politics and business. He concentrated on keeping the USA out of the war. Once the USA had joined the war, he drew up the Fourteen Points as the basis for ending the war fairly, so that future wars could be avoided.

PROFILE

David Lloyd George
(Prime Minister of Britain)

**Background**

- ★ Born 1863.
- ★ First entered politics in 1890. A very able politician who became Prime Minister in 1916 and remained in power until 1922.

Character

A realist. As an experienced politician, he knew there would have to be compromise. Thus he occupied the middle ground between the views of Wilson and those of Clemenceau.

THE FOURTEEN POINTS

- 1 No secret treaties.
- 2 Free access to the seas in peacetime or wartime.
- 3 Free trade between countries.
- 4 All countries to work towards disarmament.
- 5 Colonies to have a say in their own future.
- 6 German troops to leave Russia.
- 7 Independence for Belgium.
- 8 France to regain Alsace–Lorraine.
- 9 Frontier between Austria and Italy to be adjusted.
- 10 Self-determination for the peoples of eastern Europe (they should rule themselves).
- 11 Serbia to have access to the sea.
- 12 Self-determination for the people in the Turkish Empire.
- 13 Poland to become an independent state with access to the sea.
- 14 League of Nations to be set up.

Many people in France and Britain did not agree with the ideas contained in Wilson's Fourteen Points. They seemed impractical. Take self-determination, for example. It would be very difficult to give the peoples of eastern Europe the chance to rule themselves because they were scattered across many countries. For example, 25 per cent of the population of the new state of Czechoslovakia were neither Czechs nor Slovaks. Some people were bound to end up being ruled by people from another group with different customs and a different language. Some historians have pointed out that while Wilson talked a great deal about eastern and central Europe, he did not actually know very much about the area.

David Lloyd George (Great Britain)

At the peace talks Lloyd George was often in the middle ground between Clemenceau and Wilson. He wanted Germany to be justly punished but not too harshly. He wanted Germany to lose its navy and its colonies because Britain thought they threatened the British Empire. However, like Wilson, he did not want Germany to seek revenge in the future and possibly start another war. He was also keen for Britain and Germany to begin trading with each other again. Before the war, Germany had been Britain's second largest trading partner. British people might not like it, but the fact was that trade with Germany meant jobs for them.

SOURCE 6

We want a peace which will be just, but not vindictive. We want a stern peace because the occasion demands it, but the severity must be designed, not for vengeance, but for justice. Above all, we want to protect the future against a repetition of the horrors of this war.

Lloyd George speaking to the House of Commons, before the Peace Conference.

Like Clemenceau, Lloyd George had real problems with public pressures at home for a harsh treaty (see Sources 3 and 4 on page 81). Even his own MPs did not always agree with him and he had just won the 1918 election in Britain by promising to 'make Germany pay', even though he realised the dangers of this course of action.

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Leader	Country	Attitude Towards Germany	Main Aim(s)
	France		
Woodrow Wilson			
	Great Britain		

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The Main Terms of the Treaty of Versailles

1. Territorial Changes

- a) Alsace-Lorraine to be returned to France
- b) Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia to receive German border areas
- c) Poland re-established as an independent state with access to the Baltic Sea (the Polish Corridor to Danzig)
- d) Danzig to be a free city under the League of Nations
- e) Germany to give up all overseas colonies to the League of Nations; mandates for administering former German colonies assigned to Britain, France, and Japan

2. Military Terms

- a) German army reduced to 100 000 troops
- b) Germany forbidden to have an airforce
- c) Most German naval vessels, including the submarine force, to be handed over to the Allies
- d) Germany forbidden to have heavy military frontier fortifications

3. Admission of War Guilt

- a) Germany forced to accept responsibility for starting the war

4. Reparations

- a) Germany to pay war reparations to France and Belgium for damages caused during the war
- b) Germany to pay reparations for shipping damages by turning over part of its merchant marine fleet

5. Other Terms

- a) Germany to cede Saar coal mines to France for fifteen years
- b) Allied troops to occupy the Rhineland for fifteen years
- c) East bank of Rhine to be demilitarized

The Treaty of Versailles was one of the most important documents of the twentieth century. Its failure helped to shape global politics for decades to come. Identify what you believe to be the three most controversial terms and justify your choices (in other words explain the reasoning behind your choices).

Choice 1

Choice 2

Choice 3

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Wilson's Fourteen Points

- I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
- II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war.
- III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.
- IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.
- V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based on the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty, the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.
- VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and... assistance of every kind that she may need and may herself desire.
- VII. Belgium... must be evacuated [by the Germans] and restored.
- VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, the wrong done to France in the matter... of Alsace-Lorraine... should be righted.
- IX. A readjustment of frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.
- X. The people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safe-guarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.
- XI. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated... Serbia accorded free access to the sea.
- XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule...[should be allowed] autonomous development.
- XIII. An independent Polish state... should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations...[and should] be assured a free and secure access to the sea.
- XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike. "The world must be made safe for democracy."

Review President Wilson's Fourteen Points. Great hope was placed by many upon the ideals set out in these Points to establish a new world order at the conclusion of the First World War. Do you believe that Points 1 to 5 and 14 have any relevance in today's world? Explain your response using present day evidence will certainly help to support your answer.

Why do you believe that Wilson's idealism did not gain much support from Britain and France at the peace conference?

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1.3.4 Draw conclusions about whether or not the Treaty of Versailles was a just peace treaty. (a)

Read the following quotes from historians about the Treaty of Versailles. You will see there are a wide variety of opinions about whether or not the Treaty was fair and just.

Using any 3 – 5 sources and your historical knowledge, do you consider this Treaty to be just, unjust, or rather just the best solution that the drafters of the treaty could develop given the circumstances at that time?

Quote 1

"Mentally, Germany was not prepared in 1919, to accept defeat. In 1914, the Germans entered the war with quite unrealistic assumptions about its origins, about its nature and about its objectives. They had developed a huge number of claims which, in fact, would have meant the complete domination of Europe by Germany, and they were mentally not willing to forfeit this all in 1918-1919.

So, as a result, we are confronted with what the bulk of the German people considered an entirely unjust treaty. So resistance against this Treaty was enormous."

Quote 2

"Basically, I think one can say the Treaty was harsh, but understandable. It did create in Germany a political climate in which it was exceedingly difficult for a democratic system to develop. Somewhat less harsh treaties certainly would have been beneficial for Germany, yet; on the other hand, the allied governments were under pressure from their own public which demanded that the Germans must pay."

Quote 3

"The majority of the German nation shared the position that Hitler took on the Treaty of Versailles: that it was unfair, and that the imposition on Germany of sole responsibility for the war was wrong.

At the same time, the Allies had among them many prominent individuals who believed that only a strong Germany could allow Europe to recover economically. So there were those on both sides who believe that what had happened to Germany was a grave mistake.

The problem was: what could be done that would enable the millions of people who had lost loved ones, to believe, that somehow, those responsible for the deaths of their loved ones, had paid the price for it – while at the same time reviving Europe's economy with a strong Germany. There's no way to do that.

Revenge and reconciliation are incompatible. The Allies tried both and got neither."

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Quote 4

"The problem with revenge is that it never ends. One act of revenge creates another. It's endless. The way in which Versailles was conducted was disastrous. It didn't provide anything that could be called worth the sacrifice of even a fraction of those who had died in the First World War."

Quote 5

"The Treaty of Versailles, which the Allies signed with Germany at the end of the First World War, has had a bad reputation ever since.

John Maynard Keynes, the great economist, thought it was stupid, vindictive and short-sighted and most writers of history and the public have followed his lead ever since. Many people have blamed the treaty for driving Germany into misery, for creating the circumstances which led to the rise of Hitler, and ultimately for producing another World War in 1939.

But historians must keep on looking at the evidence and re-evaluating the past and the time has come to take another look at that treaty.

It is my own view--and a number of historians who have been working in this area for some years--that the treaty was not all that bad. Germany did lose the war after all. Reparations apparently imposed a heavy burden but Germany only paid a portion of what it owed.

Perhaps the real problem was that the treaty was never really properly enforced so that Germany was able to rebuild its military and challenge the security of Europe all over again."

Quote 6

E.P. Thompson famously argued that historians should take care to "avoid the enormous condescension of posterity"; we should make judgements on the actions of people of the past on **their terms** rather than ours.

If we extend this philosophy to the peacemakers of 1919 then we can argue that they did a remarkably good job. Three European Empires had collapsed, economies were devastated, millions of people were homeless or victims of disease, and nationalist and communist revolutions were breaking out all over Europe. The peacemakers had to act quickly to save their world and in this they were remarkably successful

Quote 7

Compared to the treaties which Germany had imposed on defeated Russia and Rumania in 1918 the Treaty of Versailles was quite moderate... The Treaty of Versailles was not excessively harsh on Germany, either territorially or economically. However, the German people were expecting victory not defeat. It was the acknowledgement of defeat as much as the treaty terms themselves, which they found so hard to accept.