



Pestalozzi

Training Resources

History Education (HIS) The USA and the Versailles treaties

by

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Editor: Pascale Mompoin-Gaillard

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Theme: Teaching controversial issues in history: an example

Expected outcome

- To study the controversial sides of the Versailles treaties in order to help the students to develop critical thinking skills for understanding and interpreting historical events.
- To present the point of view of the USA government and the American society on the European events.
- To develop interest in multiperspectivity, and use this method when dealing with controversial issues

Target group

Type of training	School level / age	Subject area
Initial and in-service training	Ages 16-19	History

Brief description of the unit

The USA, only non-European power to participate in military operations in Europe, had an important role in the aftermath of the war and peacemaking processes. Comparing the USA approach and that of European Allied Powers to after war peacemaking will allow teachers and pupils to study controversial sides of Versailles treaties and thus will help to develop appropriate critical thinking skills for understanding and interpreting historical events. Through the example of the Versailles treaties (1919), this training session plan aims to give an example of how a teacher can teach controversial issues by using multiperspectivity distancing techniques and role play. This teaching plan provides teacher trainers with a guide and sources for presenting, analysing and understanding the American point of view on events going on in Europe on the eve, during and after the WWI.

Methods/techniques used

Role play, group research, collaborative problem solving; interpretive approach

Time 5 hours

Preparatory reading	Prior to the session
Activity 1	▶ 120 minutes
Activity 2	▶ 120 minutes
Activity 3	▶ 60 minutes

Tips for trainers

See tips in activities

Resources

Map of pre-war and post-war Europe	
Pre-reading material	Appendix 1
Historical source A	Appendix 2
Historical source B	Appendix 2

Activity 1 USA neutrality at the beginning of WW I



120 minutes

	Notes
<p>▶ General aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To develop critical thinking skills for understanding and interpreting historical events. ➢ To develop interest in multiperspectivity, and use this method when dealing with controversial issues <p>▶ Specific aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To develop an understanding of the viewpoints of belligerent sides at the start of WW I 	
<p>▶ Methods /techniques used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Group research, role play 	
<p>▶ Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Pre-reading material ➢ Flip charts and markers 	
<p>▶ Practical arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Set up the room for group work. 	

► Instructions/procedure:

- Have participants divide in groups
 - Group 1 will represent Germany and its allies,
 - Group 2 will represent the Andante countries,
 - Group 3 will represent the USA,
 - Group 3 will represent the other states with their specific interests.
- Ask each group to present the reasons and arguments for engaging in the war or for defending a position of neutrality.
- Each group will present the results of their work the the wholle group of participants
- Moderate a whole group discussion using the following 2questions:
 - *Was it possible to prevent the WW I?*
 - *What are the USA reasons to stay neutral?*

► Tips to trainers/anticipated difficulties:

- The participants will need the trainer's support to answer the questions not with their own viewpoint, but with the viewpoint of the belligerent parties, using the information they have gained through the pre-reading exercise done prior to the training session.

► Debriefing/reflecting:

- Back in their groups, ask participants to list:
 - Arguments to support the possibility of preventing the war.
 - Arguments to support the decision to engage in the war.
 - The political reasons for USA neutrality.
 - The economical reasons for USA neutrality.
- Review with the students what they have learned.

Activity 2 USA participation in WW I and after war peacemaking



120 minutes

	Notes
<p>▶ General aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To promote a multi-perspective view of the USA's positions during WW I in Europe. <p>▶ Specific aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To develop an understanding of the reasons for the change of public opinion in the USA and the American decision to engage in the conflict of WW I. 	
<p>▶ Methods/techniques used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Group research, collaborative problem solving 	
<p>▶ Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Historical source A (appendix 2) 	
<p>▶ Practical arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set up the room for group work. 	
<p>▶ Instructions/procedure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Briefly give a presentation on how the fact that economic strength becomes a serious base for growing political influence of the USA on postwar world. The USA gain even higher power due to President Woodrow Wilson's philanthropic approach in dealing with the small nation's expectations. ➤ Ask participants in groups, to search in historical sources explaining the change of Wilson's policy from neutrality to active participation in war and to follow up the same changes in American public opinion, using these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the USA's reasons to go into war?</i> 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How was the public opinion in USA changed?</i> - <i>What are the USA's interests in after war peacemaking?</i> ➤ Go thought the groups and when they are done with the 3 questions, hand out this question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Consider that in post war world the USA was the only power whose economy not only did not reduce, but grew during wartime. How did this influence the USA’s positions?”</i> ➤ Ask groups to discuss and develop strategy for a campaign aimed at influencing American public opinion to break traditional isolationism and to support the policy of USA entrance in WW I and prepare a chart of activities addressed to different groups of American society to incline them to USA going into war 	
<p>▶ Debriefing/reflecting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What have you learned during this activity? ➤ Would you be able to use activities 1 and 2 in your classroom? ➤ What challenges would you foresee? 	

Activity 3 Triumph of isolationism in the USA and its aftermath



60 minutes

	Notes
<p>▶ General aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To develop critical thinking skills for understanding and interpreting historical events. ➤ To develop interest in multiperspectivity, and use this method when dealing with controversial issues. <p>▶ Specific aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To develop an understanding of the reasons for the failure of President Woodrow Wilson’s plans. ➤ To analyse why the USA did not ratify the Versailles Treaties. 	

<p>▶ Methods/techniques used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Role play, group research, collaborative problem solving; interpretive approach 	
<p>▶ Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 size A4 card stock 	
<p>▶ Practical arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set up the room for group work. There should be enough space for participants to walk around the room when choosing and changing groups they wish to belong to. 	
<p>▶ Instructions / procedure:</p> <p><u>Step 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Write on 3 size A4 card stock join the following statements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>You mainly agree with Peace Conference decisions made and want USA continue to collaborate with European powers.</i> 2. <i>You mainly disagree with Peace Conference decisions and want USA to return to isolationism.</i> 3. <i>You are uncertain.</i> ➤ Place the cards at 3 ends of the room. Each participant goes to the card he/she agrees with. <p><u>Step 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When the group are constituted, each group works through their task: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants from the first and second groups should find in documents supporting their point of view and list brief statements on a flip chart: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Why USA should / should not ratify the Versailles treaty?</i> ▪ <i>Why USA should / should not join the League of Nations?</i> - The third group of students should discuss the same questions. 	

- After the presentation of arguments of the first two groups, the students of third group can make a final decision to join one of the first groups, or remain within their own group, supporting their decision with arguments from factual material.

Step 3

- Give a brief presentation on the following issues:
 - Most of today's European borders are a consequence of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Use the map of pre-war and post-war Europe.
 - The USA was the first to abandon the League of Nations thus parting from Woodrow Wilson's principles on international obligations of great powers.

► Tips to trainers/anticipated difficulties:

- You may want to allow participants in groups 1 and 2 to also change groups.
- A note from the author: *"President Woodrow Wilson was the champion for expectations of minor nations at the Paris Peace Conference. His "14 points" were a program for post war organization of the world envisaging independence and statehood to numerous nations of former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. The League of Nations - an international organization for preventing future wars and for collective security was created. However, Woodrow Wilson's idealistic plans did not succeed. The victorious powers chose to solve their postwar social-economic problems at the expense of the defeated. There was no place for equal rights and social justice between the winners and losers."*

Evaluation and assessment

	Notes
<p>➤ What are the 3 most important things you learned during this 5 hour session?</p>	
<p>➤ What will this change in your way of facilitating training when dealing with WW1 topics?</p>	

<p>➤ How do you think these activities would work in the classroom?</p>	
<p>➤ Would these activities be useful for dealing with other sensitive topics?</p>	

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Appendix 1:

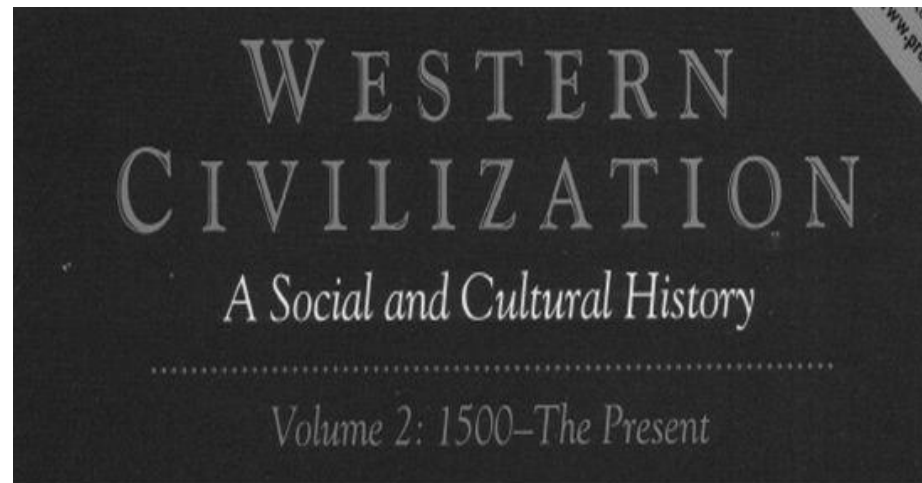
Preparatory activity

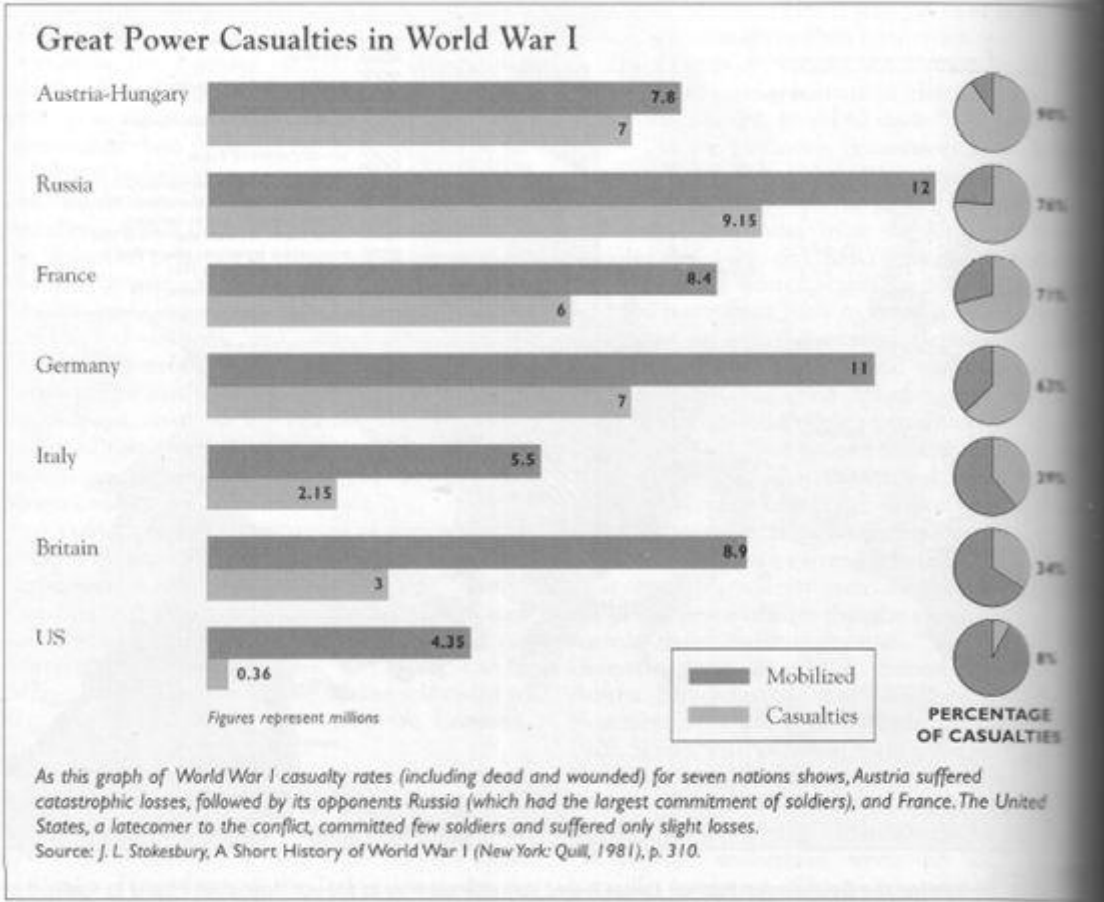
Pre-reading material:

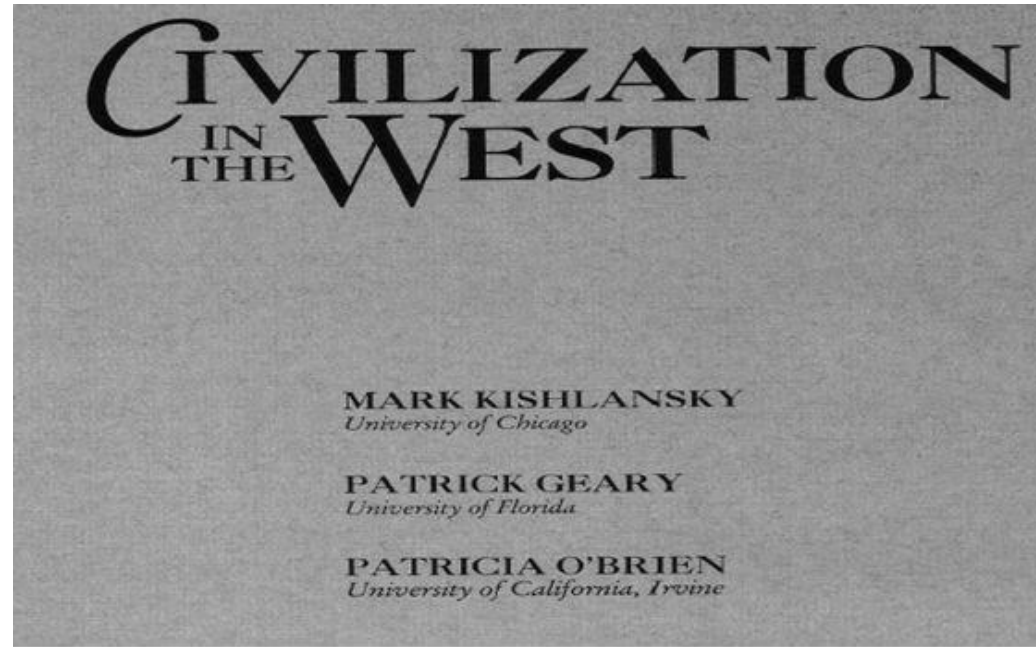
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Appendix 2:

Activity 1







page 837

The U.S. entry is significant not just because it provided reinforcements, fresh troops, and fresh supplies to the beleaguered Allies. From a broader perspective, it marked a shift in the nature of international politics: Europe was no longer able to handle its own affairs and settle its own differences without outside help.

page 839

In spite of the tremendous losses in human life and in productive capacity, the size of populations and even prosperity were not permanently affected. Europe recovered in these areas. Yet the center of world markets and finance had shifted. The big winner in the war was the United States, now a creditor nation holding billions of dollars of loans to the Allies and operating in new markets established during the war. The shift was not a temporary move but a structural change. The United States now took its place as a Great Power in the international system.

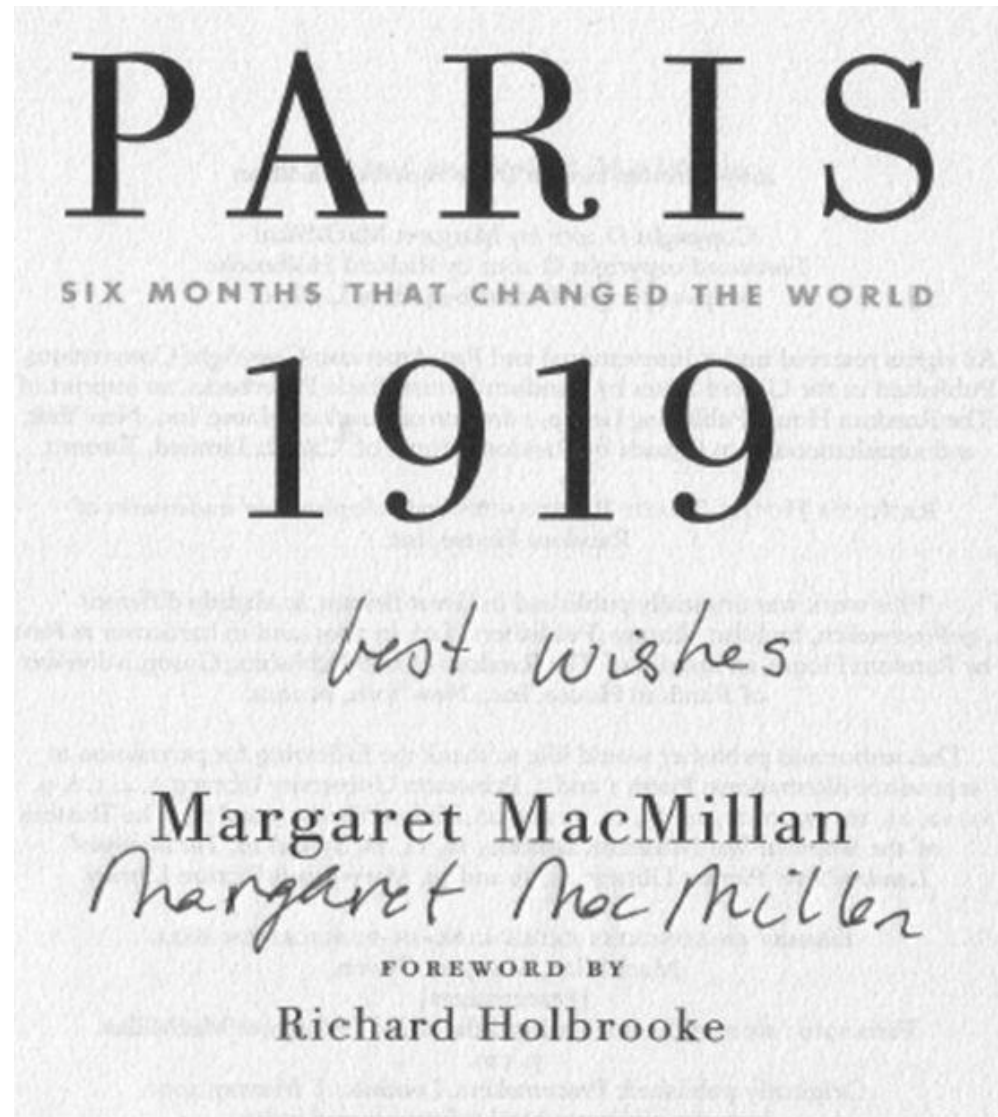
page 847

predecessors, the Versailles Treaty was a departure from what had gone before. The peace settlement of 1919 spelled the end to the system of independent European great powers that managed their international relations by themselves. The Treaty of Versailles marked the demise of European autonomy.

page 857

powers. A balance of power in Europe could no longer be maintained without outside help. Germany had been defeated, but if it recovered, France and Britain alone would probably not be able to protect Europe again. Security and peace now depended on the presence of an outside force to guarantee a stable balance of power in Europe and to defend western hegemony in the world. That outside force was the United States.

The United States was, however, unwilling to assume a new role as political leader of Europe and mediator of European conflict. It refused to sign a joint peace, arranging instead a separate peace with Germany. It also refused to join the League of Nations. Following the war, the League



The Americans had a complicated attitude toward the Europeans: a mixture of admiration for their past accomplishments, a conviction that the Allies would have been lost without the United States and a suspicion that, if the Americans were not careful, the wily Europeans would pull them into their toils again. As they prepared for the Peace Conference, the American delegates suspected that the French and the British were already preparing their traps. Perhaps the offer of an African colony, or a protectorate over Armenia or Palestine, would tempt the United States—and then suddenly it would be too late. The Americans would find themselves touching pitch while the Europeans looked on with delight.²⁹

page 14

Activity 2

“USA participation in WW I and in after war peacemaking”

THE HERITAGE OF WORLD CIVILIZATIONS

VOLUME TWO: SINCE 1500
FIFTH EDITION

Craig • Graham • Kagan • Ozment • Turner

page 933

	POPULATION (TOTAL)	SOLDIERS POTENTIALLY AVAILABLE	MILITARY EXPENDITURES (1913-1914 MILLION OF \$)	BATTLESHIPS IN SERVICE OR BEING BUILT	CRUISERS	SUBMARINES	MERCHANT SHIPS (TONS)
GREAT BRITAIN	Overseas Emp. 390 Million 45,000,000	711,000	290,000,000	64	121	64	20,000,000
FRANCE	Overseas Emp. 58 Million 40,000,000	1,250,000	185,000,000	28	34	73	2,000,000
ITALY	Overseas Emp. 2 Million 35,000,000	750,000	50,000,000	14	22	12	1,750,000
RUSSIA	164,000,000	1,200,000	325,000,000	16	14	28	750,000
BELGIUM	7,500,000	180,000	13,750,000				
ROMANIA	7,500,000	420,000	15,000,000				
GREECE	4,000,000	120,000	3,750,000				
SERBIA	1,000,000	195,000	5,250,000				
MONTE-NEGRO	500,000						
UNITED STATES	92,000,000	150,000	150,000,000	37	35	25	4,500,000
GERMANY	65,000,000	2,200,000	300,000,000	40	57	23	5,000,000
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY	50,000,000	810,000	110,000,000	16	12	6	1,000,000
OTTOMAN EMPIRE	20,000,000	360,000	40,000,000				
BULGARIA	4,500,000	340,000	5,500,000				

Figure 33-1 Relative strengths of the combatants in World War I.

The victors rejoiced, but they also had much to mourn. The casualties on all sides came to about 10 million dead and twice as many wounded. The economic and financial resources of the European states were badly strained. The victorious Allies, formerly creditors to the world, became debtors to the new American colossus, itself barely touched by the calamities of war.

The old international order, moreover, was dead. Russia was ruled by a Bolshevik dictatorship that preached world revolution and the overthrow of capitalism everywhere. Germany was in chaos. Austria-Hungary had disintegrated into a swarm of small states competing for the remains of the ancient empire. These kinds of change stirred the colonial territories ruled by the European powers; overseas empires would never again be as secure as they had seemed before the war. Europe was no longer the center of the world, free to interfere when it wished or to ignore the outer regions if it chose. Its easy confidence in material and moral progress was shattered by the brutal reality of four years of horrible war. The memory of that war lived on to shake the nerve of the victorious Western powers as they confronted the new conditions of the postwar world.

Finally, the great weakness of the peace was its failure to accept reality. Germany and Russia must inevitably play an important part in European affairs, yet they were excluded from the settlement and from the League of Nations. Given the many discontented parties, the peace was not self-enforcing; yet no satisfactory machinery for enforcing it was established. The league was never a serious force for this purpose. It was left to France, with no guarantee of support from Britain and no hope of help from the United States, to defend the new arrangements. Finland, the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were created or strengthened as a barrier to the westward expansion of Russian communism and as a threat in the rear to deter German revival. Most of these states, however, would have to rely on France in case of danger. France was simply not strong enough for the task if Germany were to rearm.

The tragedy of the Treaty of Versailles was that it was neither conciliatory enough to remove the desire for change, even at the cost of war, nor harsh enough to make another war impossible. A lasting peace required enforcing German disarmament while the more obnoxious clauses of the peace treaty were revised. Such a policy demanded continued attention to the problem, unity among the victors, and far-sighted leadership; none of these was present in adequate supply during the next two decades.

The most influential critic was John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), a brilliant British economist who took part in the peace conference. When he saw the direction it was taking, he resigned in disgust and wrote a book called *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920). It was a scathing attack, especially on reparations and the other economic clauses of the treaty. It was also a skillful assault on the negotiators, particularly on Wilson, who was depicted as a fool and a hypocrite. Keynes argued that the Treaty of Versailles was both immoral and unworkable. He called it a Carthaginian peace, referring to the utter destruction of Carthage by Rome after the Third Punic War (149–146 B.C.E.). He argued that such a peace would bring economic ruin and war to Europe unless it were repudiated. Keynes had a great effect on the British, who were already suspicious of France and glad of an excuse to withdraw from continental affairs. The decent and respectable position came to be one that aimed at revision of the treaty in favor of Germany.

page 943

Even more important was the book's influence in the United States. It fed the traditional tendency toward isolationism and gave powerful weapons to Wilson's enemies. Wilson's own political mistakes helped prevent American ratification of the treaty. Consequently, America was out of the League of Nations and not bound to defend France. Britain, therefore, was also free from its obligation to France. France was left to protect itself without adequate means to do so for long.

Many of the attacks on the Treaty of Versailles are unjustified. It was not a Carthaginian peace. Germany was neither dismembered nor ruined. Reparations could be and were scaled down, and until the great world depression of the 1930s the Germans recovered a high level of prosperity. Complaints against the peace should also be measured against the peace the victorious Germans had imposed on Russia at Brest-Litovsk and their plans for a European settlement in case of victory. Both were far more severe than anything enacted at Versailles. The attempt at achieving self-determination for nationalities was less than perfect, but it was the best solution Europe had ever accomplished in that direction.

In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt ran unsuccessfully for the presidency on a third-party ticket challenging both traditional Republicans and Democrats. At the Progressive Party convention he delivered a remarkable speech in which he set forth his most important progressive convictions. The issues Roosevelt raised in this speech have continued to echo all through the rest of twentieth-century American politics.

I believe in a protective tariff, but I believe in it as a principle, approached from the standpoint of the interest of the whole people, and not as a bundle of preferences to be given to favored individuals. . . .

There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country. Just as we must conserve our men, women and children, so we must conserve the resources of the land on which they live. . . .

Our cause is based on the eternal principle of righteousness; and even though we who now lead may for the time fail, in the end the cause itself shall triumph. . . . I say in closing: We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord.

From Theodore Roosevelt's Confession of Faith Before the Progressive National Convention, August 6, 1912, as quoted in Oscar Handlin, ed., *Readings in American History*. Copyright © 1957 Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 477-480.