

Wilson's 14 Points and the Treaty of Versailles

In a January 8, 1918 address before a joint session of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson outlined "Fourteen Points" that he felt, taken all together, offered the best chance for an end to the fighting and bringing peace to Europe. At the same time, the "Fourteen Points" were a statement of America's peace aims, that the U.S. would not be a party to a narrow, vengeful peace settlement. Wilson was offering a proposal that could bring peace to the warring nations, and he was specifically encouraging Germany and her allies to end the fighting.

Germany Seeks a Truce

By the end of the summer in 1918, Germany and the Central Powers were exhausted and on the brink of total defeat. The German military attacks of 1918 were all blunted and thrown back, and everywhere along the front the Allied armies were advancing. Germany's armies were falling apart, and soldiers were in full retreat back toward Germany's frontiers. Panic seized the German military leaders, and they urgently demanded that their government ask the Allies for a truce and a negotiated peace based on Wilson's "Fourteen Points."

Germany Settles Its Account

The Treaty of Versailles was totally the work of the Allied governments. Germany was not invited to the peace table, and there would be no negotiations. Lloyd George of England, Georges Clemenceau of France, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States, assisted by special committees, fashioned the final treaty. The Allies were determined to make Germany pay for the horrible war that engulfed Europe and the world. It was a settling of accounts, and the Germans would pay dearly. The Germans were given the treaty, enclosed in a small volume, and were told to sign within a few days or the Allied armies, filled with Americans, would march and invade Germany.

The Result

Many of Wilson's "Fourteen Points" were forgotten or simply put aside in the course of the negotiations. There were simply too many secret treaties, and it was "pay-up" time. Woodrow Wilson was the idealist; all the others were practical politicians with their feet planted solidly on the ground. Wilson got his League of Nations, and it became a part of the Treaty of Versailles, but most of the rest of his ideas were brushed aside, as the winners busily re-drew the map of Europe. Some at the conference already knew that what they created at Versailles would inevitably lead to another war. The humiliation of Germany brought about the rise of Adolf Hitler.

For you to do: Compare the Fourteen Points to the Treaty of Versailles

Directions: Carefully read Germany's Punishments under the Treaty of Versailles (p. 2) and answer the questions on p. 3. Use extra paper if necessary.

Germany's Punishment Under the Treaty of Versailles

1. Germany required to take sole responsibility for starting the war.
2. Germany required to pay all damages suffered by the Allies in war. Amount was unknown at signing, but Germany agreed to sign a "blank check" (any amount could be filled in; \$36 billion was finally worked out).
3. The Kaiser and other national leaders are declared war criminals and are ordered to stand trial. (The Kaiser flees to the Netherlands.)
4. German Army is cut to 100,000 men, with 1,000 officers as administrators.
5. No Air Force.
6. No Navy.
7. The Rhineland will be occupied by French/Allied troops for 15 years.
8. Poland gains a corridor to the sea, carved from German territory, which places several hundred thousand Germans under Polish rule.
9. German waters are "internationalized," and open to vessels of all nations.
10. Germany loses all colonies in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. (Japan gets the Pacific island colonies, England the African ones).
11. The Saar basin, Germany's richest and major source of energy (coal), is turned over to France for 15 years.
12. Germany loses valuable coal fields to Poland.
13. Alsace-Lorraine returned to France.
14. League of Nations is created, but Germany is not allowed to join for nine years.
15. German troops pull out of Belgium and restore its freedom.
16. German troops pull out of Russia.

Punishment of Central Powers Under Treaty of Versailles

17. Austria-Hungarian Empire loses 2/3 of its territory and new nations are created.
18. Austria-Hungary's Slavic people get new nations: the Czechs and the Slovaks get Czechoslovakia (taken from Germany and Austria-Hungary); Serbia gets its "Greater Serbia"—called Yugoslavia--taken from Austro-Hungarian territory.
19. Poland once again becomes a nation, carved from Germany.
20. Finland becomes an independent nation.
21. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gain independence from Russia.
22. Romania gains territory from Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary.
23. The Ottoman Empire is broken apart. Turkey becomes an independent nation. France gains control of Syria and Lebanon. Britain gains control of Iraq, Israel and Jordan, and gains great influence on the Arabian peninsula and in Egypt.

HOW THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES SOWED THE SEEDS FOR ANOTHER WAR

Now that you understand what the Treaty of Versailles required of Germany, complete the questions below to understand how that treaty sowed the seeds for another war.

At the end of WWI, Germany erupted into chaos and civil war, as different groups (including a young Nazi party) fought for power. Before the war, Germany had been a militaristic society whose leaders had been drawn largely from the Prussian Army officer elite. Kaiser Wilhelm II was King of Prussia as well as Emperor of Germany.

1. What in the Treaty of Versailles created a leadership vacuum that gave an opening for someone (for example, the Nazis) to try to fill?

German nationalists (especially the Nazis) pointed to the Treaty of Versailles as a source of humiliation and impoverishment of Germany. This became a rallying point for the nationalists, who claimed that Germany had been “stabbed in the back” at Versailles.

2. What features of the treaty would have humiliated Germany?

3. What features of the treaty would have hurt Germany economically?

4. The League of Nations was created to maintain world peace. It gave countries a forum for airing and negotiating international disputes. In your opinion, would it be best to leave nations who have a history of bullying others out of such a forum or would it be best to include them? Explain your answer and relate it to Germany’s role in the League.
