

Background Reading – Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations

As you read, highlight important information that helps you to answer the question below.

What Caused World War II?

- Think about the role of the Treaty of Versailles and expansionism.
- Think about the role and effectiveness of appeasement.
- Think about the effectiveness of the League of Nations.
- Think about which cause(s) were most important in causing the war.

The French believed from the start that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were not severe enough to prevent Germany from becoming the dominant continental power again. The French wanted to permanently neuter the capability of Germany to be a great power by dividing Germany into small, less powerful states.

In contrast, to the German mind, the terms were too severe. The Treaty of Versailles placed "war guilt" on the Germany and Austro-Hungarian governments. It punished them for their "responsibility."

For the Germans, the results of the Treaty of Versailles, included

- large monetary reparations (money paid for damages),
- the loss of all former colonies,
- the separation of millions of ethnic Germans into neighboring countries,
- ethnic resettlement in large numbers,
- hyperinflation of the German currency, and
- occupation by Allied troops until 1930.

The government of Germany following World War I is known as the Weimar Republic. The Weimar Republic printed trillions of Deutsch marks and also borrowed heavily from the United States in order to pay war reparations to Great Britain and France, as required by the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Versailles generated German resentment towards the victors of World War I.

The League of Nations was founded after World War I to prevent future wars. The purpose of the League of Nations was to settle disputes between individual nations. The United States did not join the League of Nations because President Wilson could not gain the support of the U.S. Congress. The League of Nation's methods included

- disarmament,
- preventing war through collective security,
- settling disputes between countries through negotiation diplomacy, and
- improving global welfare.

Unit 5: Crisis and Change
Lesson F: The Failure of Democracy and Return of War
Student Resource: Background Reading – Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations

After numerous successes and some early failures in the 1920s, the League of Nations proved incapable of preventing aggression (to begin hostility or attack first) in the 1930s by the Axis Powers – Germany, Italy, and Japan. Factors leading to the inevitable failure of the League of Nations included

- the absence of the United States,
- the lack of an armed force of the League of Nations,
- dependence on members to enforce resolutions, honor economic sanctions, or provide armed forces,
- the reliance upon unanimous decisions, and
- the continued self-interest of its leading members.