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History

America in the Great War

The start of World War I (WWI) is most often marked by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian Black Hand anarchist. The Archduke was to have been the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In fact, the circumstances that led to the war began many years before, due to forces of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism within the countries that would become involved. Schuman (1953, p. 283) explains how throughout history nationalism grew from conflicts and wars against "alien groups." Alien groups are groups of people 'different' from the majority population. The key to understanding nationalism is to learn their point of view about the people around them who were born in another country or those who live according to a different system of values and beliefs (such as worshipping an unfamiliar religion).

Imperialistic feelings and actions of the U. S., Japan and Germany were growing before World War I. The countries wanted to expand and control more land in order to gain more natural resources. Germany applied "peaceful penetration strategies into Italy, Turkey, Brazil, and Venezuela" by offering development funding in order to expand its power (Democracy, 1919, p. 223). In fact, Germany had evolved into an autocratic militaristic nation-state which was prepared at all times for war; this strategy was well-suited to its imperialistic ambitions.

On the other hand, the U. S. and other European countries had been developing democracies, the opposite style from Germany. In the U. S. and Europe, citizens were allowed to pursue their own goals. In Germany citizens

were expected to put national goals before personal. Pan-German propaganda was used to make all Germans (at that time all those with Teutonic heritage) to feel a connection to all other Germans based upon the similarities in ancestry, history and culture. Importantly, in light of the goal of imperialism, Pan-Germans were instilled with a pride in themselves for being a part of the group, but also pride in the group and a desire to work together towards common goals.

The self-image of Germany and its emperor as a super-power was not threatened until after the Balkan Wars. The Slavs had developed a nationalistic personality during the war with the Ottoman Empire. The occupation of the Balkans by the Ottomans had given Slavs years to struggle against a common enemy, in that way a strong sense of nationalism developed. Germany and its emperor were threatened because the population of Slavs in the Balkans counted more than 200 million. Therefore the Slavic population was larger than the German-Teutonic population (Schuman, 1953).

China had refused to trade with Westerners for centuries, but the countries of England, Germany, France and Russia claimed that no nation (not even China) “ should impede trade with China” (Clark, 2001, p. 16). The West, especially England, demanded the opportunity to balance to the amount of trade between China and the West. The country of China had always resisted opening up to outsiders, and besides that, the West had little that China needed. The one commodity the Chinese people desired was opium. Therefore England supplied the Chinese with opium and China supplied England with consumer goods such as porcelain dishes and silk textiles. The

Boxer Rebellion in China started gaining momentum in 1899 when the negative attitudes towards the west were so strong that the Boxers even killed Chinese converts to Christianity as well as white missionaries (Clark, 2001, p. 19). The Boxer movement was solidified by a general atmosphere of anti-Western sentiments.

President Woodrow Wilson used both his private and public diplomacy during the years from 1914 to 1917 to influence Congressional and public opinions about World War I (Doenecke, 2011). During the beginning of the period Wilson did everything he could to make sure America remained neutral. It was a difficult task especially after Germany sunk the Lusitania, a passenger liner, killing 128 Americans on May 7, 1915. Doenecke (p. 1) quoted Wilson as writing sometime during September 1915 that " We are walking on quicksand" noting that " quicksand" was a very good description of America's position, because the U. S. was caught in the middle between neutrality and joining the war. Woodrow's opinion about joining the war made the European nations distrust him (Doenecke, p. 232). So, at first, the U. S. remained neutral and did not enter WWI (although the American government was loaning money to the Allies).

America was a country of immigrants therefore pro-war and anti-war sentiments fell along ethnic lines. German Americans who made up about half of the population supported Wilson's plans for military preparedness but not declaring war (Doenecke, 2011). Pro-German propaganda was very effective in the U. S. One example is the weekly newspaper, Fatherland, which was the Second Reich's, mouthpiece (Doenecke, p. 16). The Second Reich was the German Empire during the period from the unification of

Germany in 1871 until the end of WWI Doenecke. The Irish-Americans joined the German-Americans in holding a negative attitude against England. The German-Americans were against England simply because they were pro-Germany and England was not. The Irish-Americans were against England on any and all subjects because they were upset about British rule of Emerald Island which Ireland claimed (Doenecke, p. 17).

Wilson understood that there were problems with The Treaty of Versailles but he was confident that the League of Nations would “adequately guarantee global peace and order in the decades to come” (James & Wells, 1998, p. 86). Wilson proposed the organization as one of the Fourteen Points plan he drew to bring peace to Europe, treating each country as fairly as possible. The other points were about enforcing and regulating European peace. He wanted to offer an alternative to the military enforcement and the regulations that his first 13 points addressed (James & Wells, 1998, p. 86).

The League of Nations was created in 1920 and located in Geneva, Switzerland. The main goal of the League was to offer a place for nations to work out their differences so instead of war, international disputes would be resolved diplomatically. Unfortunately, the U. S. never joined the League of Nations.

The Treaty of Versailles punished the Axis powers by placing extremely harsh conditions on Germany in the name of peace. Germany was forced to disarm, causing them to lose the military weapons build-up that had occurred during the war (Schuman, p. 230). The writers of the Treaty assumed that Germany started the war, so the German citizens were required “to pay compensation to the victors for all civilian damages”

(Schuman, p. 230). Although this money was never paid by Germany, for the civilian damages caused in Europe, the concept shows how the Allies were focused on humiliating the Germans. But the terms of the peace treaty backfired on the Allies when in 1935 Germany began a military draft for soldiers (Schuman, p. 231). This was the end of the Treaty of Versailles and WWII would soon begin.

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