

# Dehumanization impact of war essays example

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Compare and contrast situations in war](#) \n \t
2. [Requirements of successful leadership](#) \n \t
3. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
4. [Works cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

## **Compare and contrast situations in war**

Understanding the reasons why men fight, why they endure emotional, physical, mental torture and death in war are complex, uncertain and even thought to be unanswerable. Despite lack of a single unifying theory to explain motivation of soldiers in combat, military leaders have to find methods to motivate their men in order to achieve victory. Historians have established several methods to inquire the motivation for war. Content analysis is widely used by several historians and war psychologists to reveal the motivation of soldiers in the Second World War and the American Civil War. What is most noticeable about both wars is that they shared motivational factors for soldiers in some cases.

The American Civil War is the greatest revolutionary war fought on American soil. This war fought for different ideologies; democracy, slavery, the confederacy and maintenance of civil rights. In *Cause and Comrades*, McPherson identifies three stages of motivation for the civil war soldier; initial, sustenance and combative. The Civil War soldiers in 1860 comprised the most literate armies in history at the time. Ninety four per cent of Union

soldiers from the North could read and write, in comparison to eighty three per cent of the confederate southern soldiers. This means that they held good jobs and maintained high social standing as slaveholders and landowners. War motivation history thus seeks to explain why these soldiers left their homes to endure fighting, maiming and even death (McPherson 32).

Motivational factors varied sharply for soldiers in the North and the South. The greatest source of motivation for northern soldiers was preservation of the union. For these soldiers, the war was a quest to maintain patriotism and nationalistic fervor (McPherson 32). Abraham Lincoln, one of the war leaders held to this factor by creating significant events for union soldiers such as firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861. The young soldiers of that era believed that a united America, founded on democracy, was the best hope for humanity. At the time, democracy was still an experimental political theory, with many nations still ruled by absolutist monarchists. The fight for a united country, based on humanitarian practices that allowed for equal rights of men was on top of the agenda for union soldiers.

McPherson (47) maintains that the anti-slavery sentiment held by individuals from the Northern states of America rubbed off the wrong way on southerners and was a major motivation for war. While the two fronts rarely fought on the issue of slavery, southerners felt isolated from America and felt as though they lived in another country. For confederate southern soldiers, their battle was a show of patriotism, though based on different ideologies.

Apart from the ideological motivations of war, soldiers fought to maintain the

societal beliefs of bravery, honor, courage and duty. These reasons masked other minor motivational factors such as desire for personal glory, sense of adventure and peer pressure. McPherson (57) asserts that the initial motivational factors that led men to war did not dissipate after enlisting. Rigorous training, high levels of discipline and training encouraged the soldiers and kept them in check.

The primary group cohesion was a key motivational factor that ensured that soldiers stood firm in the face of death. Soldiers are arranged in functional units that consist of platoons and comrades who are bound by the adversity of common danger. This creates a mutual dependency between soldiers who have diverse roles. The survival of the group is pegged on mutual support and steadiness of each individual in performance of their duties. Therefore, soldiers derive higher motivation from the fear of ostracism by fellow comrades that court martial or deserter action Henderson (79).

The Second World War, fought primarily between Americans and the Germans, also provides interesting insights on the motivational forces that drive soldiers in war situations. The study of this war is particularly interesting due to the differences in political systems of the warring factions, the different fighting conditions, military traditions and the ideologies held by the diverse camps. Primary group cohesion, ideologies, desire to end the war and go home, vindication, personal gratification and religion were some of the main motivational factors for soldiers in the Second World War.

Henderson (101) defines cohesion as a “ set of mutual beliefs that cause people to act as a collective whole.” Primary group cohesion relates to organizational integrity, tenacity and fighting effectiveness and was a major

motivational factor for German soldiers. Henderson asserts that while primary group cohesion mostly applies to small units, the group motivations are often in line with the army objectives and goals. The face-to-face interaction and association between soldiers creates a form of fusion that forces soldiers not only to look out for themselves, but also for their comrades.

Ideologies such as the supremacy of Germans over other races played an important role in getting soldiers to enlist, but had little control over soldier's behavior after they joined the war. Research also shows that volunteer armies also depict higher levels of ideological motivation as compared to conscript armies. For instance, in the Second World War, most American soldiers lacked a deep conviction for the necessity of the war. While they considered it important to protect their national boundaries after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, most soldiers gave little consideration to the conflicting values underlying the war.

Ideology was a major underlying force for Wehrmacht soldiers in the Second World War. Leaders of the Third Reich described the war against the Soviet Union as 'Weltanschauungskrieg', which literally means 'war of ideologies'. Henderson (119) emphasizes that Nazism was strong among the German camp. At least a third of the low ranking soldiers were exposed to Nazi propaganda. Attitudes toward enemy factions also play a major motivational role in war. American soldiers were less empathic toward Japanese soldiers due to the direct attack on Pearl Harbor.

Personal gratification resulting from the attainment of power, prestige, money, public approval and adventure was a motivational force that drew

individuals to get enlisted to the war. However, personal gratification plays a little role in actual combat environments. The attainment of war medals, recognition among peers and perception of bravery led many young men from both factions to enlist in the war. While money and poor economic conditions were sometimes a factor that encouraged individuals to enlist, Henderson (123) insists that soldiers understand that no job is worth dying for.

Despite the fact that religious disposition was not an underlying factor that led to the Second World War, it played a significant role in encouraging cohesion. The broad umbrella of Christianity that covers the United States provides values that underpin the need for cohesion among comrades Henderson (145). No religious beliefs can be tied to the success of any faction in the Second World War. In fact, prayer does not necessarily indicate religious faith; it may be adopted as a psychological self-defense mechanism.

Vindication against the enemy can best be considered a motivational factor in the case of American soldiers fighting the Japanese for their attack on Pearl Harbor. The desire to end the war and get back home was a major motivational force for American soldiers. Henderson asserts that half of the soldiers in the Second World War endured combat situations and held the desire to keep fighting only with the aim to finish the war and go back home Henderson (151).

Dehumanization refers to the process through which individuals are denied their humanness and treated as less deserving members of society.

Dehumanization can take barbaric forms such as enslavement, denial of

human rights, torture, verbal abuse, refusing eye contact, erasing one's voice from the discourse and so forth. War and conflict usually result in dehumanizing effects on the conquered.

The Mytilenean revolt in the Peloponnesian War provides an incident that clearly exhibits dehumanization. The Mytilenean revolt occurred during the Peloponnesian War and was fought between the people of Lesbos and the Athenians. The revolt against Athens was led by the Mytilenean government in conjunction with other smaller cities such as Sparta and Boeotia. The great polis of Mytilene declared itself independent of Athenian rule at a time when Athens was suffering from plagues and the long effect of war. The Mytilenean government packed food supplies and other non-perishables preparing for war but was intercepted by Athenian fleets. At this point, all of its former allies took a step back and did not come to the aid of the Mytilene. The aristocratic leaders of Mytilene failed to motivate their lower classes to fight against the Athenian army and the city had to surrender.

After the surrender of the great polis of Mytilene, Athens held an assembly led by Cleons who advocated for indiscriminate killing of all Mytilenean men and enslavement of women and children. A second assembly was held to reconsider the previous sentence and a great debate ensued between Diodotus and Cleons. The debate turns into rhetoric about the proper foundations of state policy; with Cleons insisting that a democracy is incapable of running a great empire. The debate reveals the self-interest that underlies the great Athenian empire. The ideals of the Funeral oration hold that freedom is only for the Athenians. After great debate and a public spectacle, the second assembly revokes the initial order to kill all Mytilenean

men. The assembly passes a lighter sentence that requires that the ringleaders of the revolt be executed.

The First and Second World Wars were instruments of massive dehumanization. The First World War led by Adolf Hitler was based on ideological differences that spread stereotypes that encouraged dehumanization. The Nazi party spread propaganda that blamed the Jews for all the social and economic problems that plagued the German citizenry (Housden 87). The propaganda succeeded in dehumanizing the Jews and creating widespread anti-Semitic sentiments. The Nazis used schools, films, art, music, political campaigns and other media to propagate hatred and despise toward Jews.

The Reich Citizenship Law of 1935 set to establish who was a Jew or German. This law, enacted by the German parliament set the stage for persecution of Jews by removal from jobs, denial of intermarriage with Christians, loss of civil and human rights (Housden 98). Verbal and physical abuse of Jews took new meaning with the requirement for Jews to brand their clothes with the Star of David. The verbal abuse, persecution and separation from society escalated to full-scale war and execution on the Kristallnacht. On this night, the Nazi German government ordered for deportation of nearly ten thousand Jews into consecration camps. In the process, hundreds of Jews were killed; setting the stage for mass genocide.

## **Requirements of successful leadership**

The success of an army at war is highly determined by the personal characteristics of their leader. Army generals have to be influential, charismatic, motivators and enthusiastic about their cause. To understand



the requirements of a successful leader in war, we will evaluate the leadership traits of Abraham Lincoln and Adolf Hitler.

Abraham Lincoln was the great liberator of the North and champion for the Union. Lincoln is adored for his oratory skills and mastery of language. He is celebrated as a public speaker, debater, poet, humorist, writer and conversationalist (Keegan 68). Lincoln used the power of words to weaken and ridicule his opponents, amass the favor of supporters and encourage soldiers during the civil war. Lincoln's success in war is greatly determined by his success in politics and his ability to sway masses.

In conflict situations, Lincoln encouraged discipline, courage and practicality. He experimented heavily with war strategies, changed army generals several times and created unity of cause among the soldiers. The Emancipation Proclamation was the result of Lincoln's tough stand against slavery and his desire to see all men free (Keegan 69). While this was not the driving force of the Civil War, Lincoln managed to use the war to achieve his own purpose.

Adolf Hitler is one of the most recognizable villains of the Second World War. His success in war is underpinned by specific leadership traits such as; autocratic control, reliance on instinct, charisma, confidence, extreme conviction in his cause, ruthless command and oratory skills (Housden 121). Adolf Hitler's success in politics and war was largely a result of his oratory skill. Like Lincoln before him, Hitler was eloquent, entertaining and capable of eliciting a deep sense of national pride from the Germans.

Hitler exhibits extreme conviction in his messages to the people. His belief that Jews were to blame for the social, economic and political deterioration of

Germany was passed to the minds of German citizens. Hitler was convinced that Aryans were a superior race, who exhibited superior genes and thus required to dominate the world in form of supremacy (Housden, 2000).

Hitler's ruthlessness in battle endeared him to citizens and soldiers who saw him as courageous, bold and fearless.

Hitler and his armies espoused 'Führerprinzip' or the so-called Leader principle. In the Axis armies, Hitler had complete control and command over strategy, direction and fate of enemies. Leadership in the army followed a bureaucratic, centralized leadership style that created unity of command (Housden 124). In war, Hitler took on a brazen, forward approach that led him to the field. Unlike many of today's leaders who cower behind their armies and weapons, Hitler went to the field to fight as a military commander.

While strategy and preparedness play a major role in the success of an army, Hitler's reliance on 'gut instinct' sometimes carried the day. Since he was not an expert in intellectual discourse, military strategies and diplomacy; Hitler preferred to use his instinct as a source of strategy. The use of instinct sometimes proved useful in case military strategies had been intercepted. Hitler's confidence is the reason why his armies and army generals relied on his gut instinct. It would be abnormal for a modern army to move and change war strategies based on 'a feeling' rather than fact-based evidence. A paradoxical fact about Hitler's leadership style is that while he harbored deep mistrust about his generals, they on the other hand admired and adored his political leadership, conviction, ability to influence and goal setting abilities. Hitler's distrust and suspicion toward his generals was

expressed as the need to control power, exercise autonomous leadership and decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

Society comprises of individuals from different backgrounds, ethnicities, races, religions and cultures. The interaction of individuals from different factions may result to conflict, which in some cases results to war. The study of the background motivators of war, factors that fuel conflict and its implications on society is important to understand how to prevent future wars.

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