

IB Standard Level History
Paris Peace Treaties 1919-1920

Dr. Liam Browne

Director of Studies, St. Nicholas School, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Unit Description:

- Paris Peace Conference: Attitude of the Big 3
- Poverty and political change in Europe
- Redrawing the map and assessing reparations
- Consequences of select provisions of the treaties (such as Article 231)
- Impact of the treaties on the Axis powers

Academic Objectives:

1. Comprehend, analyse, evaluate and integrate source material critically as historical evidence in understanding the consequences of the Paris Peace Treaties.
2. Demonstrate historical understanding of aims of the peacemakers through the acquisition, selection, effective use and synthesis of knowledge.
3. Explain different approaches to, and interpretations of the origins of the Paris Peace.
4. Place events in their historical context.
5. Explain the cause and effects of historical continuity and change—intentionalist vs structuralist
6. Present historical explanations from a variety of perspectives: Allied powers, Germany, other Axis Powers.

Holistic Objectives:

- Openminded - understand and appreciate own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities.
 - *Knowledgeable of other cultures, societies, and national histories*
 - *Analyze and evaluate strengths and weaknesses of own and other cultures vis-à-vis U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- Reflective – able to give thoughtful consideration to own learning and experience; able to assess and understand personal strengths and limitations
 - *Personality*—compare one’s own personality to self and known persons
 - *Personal strengths*—compare one’s own strengths to self and known persons
- Knowledgeable — able to explore concept, ideas, and issues that have local and global significance
 - *Think like: historian, diplomat.*
- Thinker - Exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.
 - *Gather data and recognise bias*
 - *Analysis*
- Inquirer - develop their natural curiosity. Acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. Actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
 - *Curiosity*
 - *Independent investigation*
 - *Learning goals*

- Communicators—Understand and express ideas confidently and creatively.
 - *Social Awareness: Social cognition*
 - *Social Facility: Influence*

Essential Questions:

- Why is war seen as a legitimate way to solve problems?
- Can peace successfully be dictated from above?
- How can we bind nations to agreements on international conduct?

Activating Activity

- Students are given a set of quotations regarding aims and objectives of the Big Three. They will then work in groups and discuss ideas.

Content/Activities

- Consider the dilemma facing the peacemakers: Winter thesis
- Source exercise on the aims and problems of the Big Three. Listen to Giles Hill's podcast on the peacemakers.
 - http://web.mac.com/gileshill/history_at_hand/GCSE_Podcasts/Entries/2006/5/22_The_Paris_Peacemakers.html
- Graphic organiser of the Wilson's 14 Point Plan. (see Wolfson and Laver pp 141-157; Walsh pp 86-87, 92-96)
- Relationship among the Big Three – complete a spidergram
- Class discussion on the terms of the Peace Treaties (See Appendix 1)
- Axis reactions to the Treaties – too lenient/too harsh
- Contemporary and historiographical views on the Paris Peace Treaties – series of readings and reflections

Assessment

Class re-enactment of the Paris Peace Treaties with assigned teams for Germany, Britain, France, and the United States (see Appendix 2), focusing on:

- Why did Clemenceau, Wilson, and Lloyd George have such different attitudes at the Conference?
- Why did the 'Big Three' disagree so violently at the Conference?

Appendix 1

How did the Treaty of Versailles establish peace? Different Judgments

The peacemakers at Versailles hoped to make the Great War 'the war to end all wars'. The Peace of Versailles, however, has been hugely criticised.

The Germans, of course, hated it:

The criminal madness of this peace will drain Germany's national life-blood. It is a shameful blow in the face of common-sense. It is inflicting the deepest wounds on us Germans as our world lies in wreckage about us

from a speech made by a German MP in the Reichstag in 1919.

But so did many other people. John Maynard Keynes, a young member of the British delegation, angry that his suggestions about reparations had been ignored, published a damning account of the Conference: *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). His argument was that the burden of reparations would ruin Germany.

Another young member of the British delegation was similarly negative. Harold Nicolson, author of the book *Peacemaking 1919*, wrote:

The historian, with every justification, will come to the conclusion that we were very stupid men... We arrived determined that a Peace of justice and wisdom should be negotiated; we left the conference conscious that the treaties imposed upon our enemies were neither just nor wise.

Harold Nicolson

The historian William Keylor suggests that Nicolson's impressions were made significantly more pessimistic because, at the time of the Conference, his wife was having a lesbian affair - at that time, a great scandal and humiliation.

Criticisms

This impression of a failed Peace has been the overwhelming judgement of historians ever since.

The Peace of Versailles was an unsatisfactory compromise with little chance of ensuring an enduring peace. Each of the 'Big Three' had different aims which had to be modified in order to reach an overall agreement and the Germans were not even allowed to take part in the negotiations. Germany was humiliated, the French didn't feel completely secure, the British had wanted the re-establishment of trade more than anything else and the Americans had had to give up on their ideals of self determination where Germany was concerned. All this was a recipe for disaster in my opinion.

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from **Carole Faithorn** Carole Faithorn studied History and Economics at the University of London . Now retired, she was formerly Head of History at an 11-18 Catholic Boys school in Avon, England.

Many modern teachers believe that it failed to secure peace and ruined the future:

The Treaty of Versailles was flawed to the extent that instead of preventing future wars it made a future war inevitable.

State of Michigan, USA, sample core curriculum, Social Studies lesson plan 8

The lesson plan, in a section: Application Beyond School, suggests that studying the treaty of Versailles will help students understand that 'every action and choice has a consequence, and different actions and different choices result in different consequences. This is true both for individuals and for nations.

Students also learn that some actions make other actions inevitable.

The Treaty of Versailles was the basic cause of the Second World War, the holocaust and the Cold War. Why? Because it was a treaty made without thought of fairness or consideration as to what its effects might be. Instead the treaty created an alien system of democracy that was never more than stable and which because of the constitution's flaws allowed Germany to be torn apart by extremist political parties like the Communists and worse Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. In effect it put Germany in a situation it couldn't get out of, with unworkable political systems and economic and social problems just waiting to explode (hence the Nazis and their scapegoating of Jews became much easier). Had the treaty been fair and balanced it's likely Germany would never have become embroiled in starting a Second World War, nor would the madman Hitler have come to power and so the Holocaust would never have happened. Could this have been predicted? Lloyd George was sure the Treaty of Versailles would lead to a Second World War and he was right.

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from **Dave Wallbanks** (2004)

Dave Wallbanks studied history at Bradford University, and PGCE at Newcastle and is now history Curriculum Leader at an 11-16 Community College in the North of England.

The Treaty of Versailles was to ultimately lead Europe to a Second World War due to the direct fact that the Big Three' ultimately had different goals in terms of achieving peace. What is clear from the terms of the Treaty is that France had one main aim, revenge, whereas the USA wanted money and Britain, it could be said, wanted a more fair resolution that would prevent future conflict. What they all failed to take into account was that in order for a plan, a treaty or an arrangement to be successful everybody has to have the same aims and goals. This goes some way to explaining why the Treaty of Versailles was not the success that it could have been.

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from **Nichola Boughey** (2004)

Nichola Boughey gained a BA Hons in Economic and Social History at the University of Liverpool (1997-2000) and is now a History Teacher at Weatherhead High School, Wallasey

The Treaty of Versailles was an aberration. The Allies couldn't agree amongst themselves what to do with the defeated Germany and ended up accepting a document that was agreed begrudgingly by some of the major nations involved in its construction. Something created so quickly and in an environment as hostile as the immediate aftermath of the bloodiest war of all time was bound to be filled with clauses created more through fear and anger than forgiveness, compassion and a desire for rebuilding relationships and really ensuring long lasting peace. .

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from **Dan Moorhouse** (2004)

Dan Moorhouse studied History at De Montfort University and is now Head of History at a school in Bradford.

And the historian Norman Lowe made this thought-provoking aside:

The Germans did have some cause for complaint... However, Germany was still the strongest power in Europe economically, so that the unwise thing about Versailles was that it annoyed the Germans yet did *not render them too weak to retaliate*.

Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern World History* (1982)
Mastering Modern World History was a GCSE History revision book.

The Cambridge historian Jay Winter describes the Conference as a place where many countries and politicians came to try to get what they could:

The peace negotiations in Paris were like a grand bazaar where all kinds of merchants come and spread their wares – what they have to offer, what they want to buy, what they feel is theirs by right.

Jay Winter, Cambridge University

This, strangely, is almost exactly how Lenin described it:

What then is the Treaty of Versailles? It is an unparalleled and predatory peace, which has made slaves of tens of millions of people, including the most civilised. This is no peace, but terms dictated to a defenceless victim by armed robbers.

Lenin, in a speech to Political Conference of Workers, Soldiers and Villagers in October 1920

Other Socialist and Communist historians have seen the Treaty - to a greater or lesser degree - as a capitalist plot to destroy Russia:

The Versailles Peace Treaty was designed to perpetuate the repartition of the capitalist world in favour of the victor countries, and to establish a system of relationships between countries aimed at strangling Soviet Russia and suppressing the revolutionary movement throughout the world.

Endnote gloss by the **Stalinist** editor of a Plan of a Speech by Lenin to the TU Conference (1921).

A modern Marxist historian comments on this statement: 'The editors were over-focused on the Russia, making Russia the center of their universe. These guys were probably writing under Stalin's eye'.

The victorious imperial powers in the Great War - England, France and the USA... were in competition for world trade - Britain based upon the Sterling currency, USA on the Dollar and France on gold. Industrialists in all three made huge profits out of four years of slaughter, and the push towards bigger monopolies carried on in earnest. Only socialism stood in the way of the capitalists.

The common concern for the rulers of the 'Big Three' was not fear of a wounded Germany, but the spectre of working-class rebellion at home, encouraged by the 1917 Revolution in Russia. A crippled Germany was not in the interests of the USA in particular, due to her dominant geographical position in Central Europe. A co-operative and pro-capitalist Germany could act as a bulwark, or even an aggressor towards the new socialist state in the East.

The main aim of Versailles was to crush working-class movements in Germany by fostering nationalistic feelings and the sham of liberal-democratic capitalism.

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from Dafydd Humphreys (2004)

Dafydd Humphreys teaches in South London

Contributors to the worldwide web still overwhelmingly see the Treaty as a 'bad thing' - though some of them show great ignorance of the facts, and you may wonder by what right they give their opinions:

Versailles treated Germany like a rabid dog. Far from "realistic", Versailles was a greedy and vengeful treaty that had no place being in the (then) modern world...

Tyler Jones, March 9, 1991

Tyler Jones studied computer science at Northeastern University, Boston, USA, and is an expert on Language-related resources on the Web.

Mitigation

Not all writers, however, are totally hostile. There are some writers who - whilst agreeing that the Treaty of Versailles failed - point out that there are some mitigating factors that we need to take into account:

Basically, I think one can say the Treaty was harsh, but understandable... The allied governments were under the pressure of their own public which demanded the Germans to pay for it all.

Wolfgang Mommensen, historian, University of Dusseldorf

World War II was the product of a number of causes, and any attempt to blame Wilson and friends for provoking a second and even more horrible war is both incomplete and unfairly hindsighted. As many historians point out, though the Treaty of Versailles was comprehensively harsh on Germany, it was not predestined to fail as a solution for peace. In fact, from 1924 until 1931 there was a period of relative stability in European relations...

I personally tend to side with those historians who, while not hesitating to state that matters could have been handled more prudently, do not condemn the Big Three or the Treaty... Public opinion in France, Britain and the U.S. convincingly supported harsh consequences for the belligerent Germans, and that public opinion constituted a substantial constraint on the Big Three. Finally, the negotiators had to move quickly through a long agenda of issues, in order not to delay any further the establishment of a resolution to the fragile European predicament.

Given these constraints and the general exhaustion of Europe after such a long war, the Treaty of Versailles was certainly not the best one could hope for, but it seems to have been the best compromise possible.

Jaron Sandy, *Personal Conclusions about the Treaty of Versailles and Its Effects* (1999)

A final class project (1999) for a course on "How We Get Into Wars" at the University of Virginia School of Law. Its goal was to explore whether and to what extent the Treaty ending the "Great War" was consistent with the internationalist principles that Wilson had strongly advocated before the end of the fighting.

Compared to the treaties which Germany had imposed on defeated Russia and Rumania in 1918, the Treaty of Versailles was quite moderate... The Treaty of Versailles was not excessively harsh on Germany, either territorially or economically. However, the German people were expecting victory not defeat. It was the acknowledgement of defeat as much as the treaty terms themselves, which they found so hard to accept.

Dr. Ruth Henig, historian, Lancaster University

Severe as the Treaty seemed to many Germans, it should be remembered that Germany might have fared much worse. If Clemenceau had had his way, the Rhineland would have become an independent state, the Saar would have become part of France, and Danzig would have become part of Poland.

The British historian W Carr, *A History of Germany* (1972)

In conclusion it has to be said that this collection of peace treaties was *not a conspicuous success*. It had the unfortunate effect of dividing Europe into the states which wanted to *revise the settlement* (Germany being the main one), and those which wanted to *preserve it*. On the whole, the latter turned out to be lukewarm in support... and it became increasingly difficult to apply the terms fully. But it is easy to criticise after the event. Gilbert White, an American delegate at the Conference, put it perfectly when he remarked that given the problems involved, 'it is not surprising that they made a bad peace; what is surprising is that they managed to make peace at all'.

Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern World History* (1982)
Mastering Modern World History was a GCSE History revision book.

Praise

Few writers have found anything to praise about the Treaty. Much of the praise is muted.

This writer, for example, praises what he sees as a 'genuine' (but 'imperfect' and 'ineffective') attempt at 'multiculturalism':

The boundaries drawn in 1919 represented "the closest approximation of an ethnographic map of Europe that has ever been achieved." And it must not be forgotten – although it has been by most – that a genuine effort was made to safeguard the rights of those ethnic minorities that were caught within the frontiers of states dominated by other national groups. In short, here was a commitment – however imperfect, and however ineffective as it turned out – to what we would today call "multiculturalism."

William R. Keylor, *A Re-Evaluation Of The Versailles Peace* (1995)

A presentation at the Great War Society seminar at Bethesda, USA. Dr. William R. Keylor is chairman of the Department of History and professor of international relations at Boston University.

And some historians are prepared to praise the Treaty *in the circumstances*:

Nothing about the treaty of Versailles – its origins, its drafting, or the responses it elicited – submits to rational explanation. The treaty makes sense only if we view it as part of the frightful time from which it emerged.

When we review the conflicting perceptions of reality separating victor from defeated, only pure, blind luck could have led to a lasting peace in 1919. Albert I of Belgium has been credited with the most sensible verdict on the peace conference of 1919: "What would you have?" He is quoted as having said. "They did the best they could." And they did. From our point of vantage we can be generous and thank them for giving us the League, and the precedent of popular consultation on issues [i.e. 'plebiscites'] that had not been attended by democratic ritual before. World War II overshadowed these modest gains, but it did not invalidate them, and in its wake, some of the mistakes of 1919, at any rate, were not repeated. What would you have? This is the laborious way in which mankind occasionally makes progress.

Written in 1989 by Dr Hans Schmitt of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies
at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

The Last Word

The expert on the Treaty of Versailles is Margaret MacMillan (who was [interviewed on PBS](#) about the Treaty in May 2004), and - as the great-granddaughter of Lloyd George - it is appropriate that she should have the last word about the Treaty. This is her considered verdict :

The Treaty of Versailles, which the Allies signed with Germany at the end of the First World War, has had a bad reputation ever since. John Maynard Keynes, the great economist, thought it was stupid, vindictive and short-sighted and most writers of history and the public have followed his lead ever since. Many people have blamed the treaty for driving Germany into misery, for creating the circumstances which led to the rise of Hitler, and ultimately for producing another World War in 1939. But historians must keep on looking at the evidence and re-evaluating the past and the time has come to take another look at that treaty. It is my own view--and a number of historians who have been working in this area for some years--that the treaty was not all that bad. Germany did lose the war after all. Reparations apparently imposed a heavy burden but Germany only paid a portion of what it owed. Perhaps the real problem was that the treaty was never really properly enforced so that Germany was able to rebuild its military and challenge the security of Europe all over again.

A private communication to www.johndclare.net from Margaret MacMillan (2004)

Margaret MacMillan gained her PhD at Oxford University, and is currently Professor of History and Provost of Trinity College at the University of Toronto, Canada. Her 500-page book on the Treaty -- *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World* (2001) -- won the BBC4 Samuel Johnson prize and has been described as 'magnificent', 'enthraling', and 'detailed, fair, unfailingly lively', as well as 'splendidly revisionist'.

Adapted from http://www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties1_Answer.htm

Appendix 2

Paris Peace Conference:

Writing a Treaty to End World War I



Photograph from the National Archives
The signing of the Treaty of Versailles

This problem-based learning unit asks students to assume roles as experts from countries that participated in World War I. These experts will meet both in expert groups and with their respective country representatives to determine what terms, in four specific areas, should be included in the treaty which will formally end the war. Next, they must decide as countries whether they will sign the treaty they have negotiated. To conclude the unit, students will compare the treaty they create with the real Treaty of Versailles to determine which treaty would most likely ensure long lasting peace in Europe.

The Task:

You are a citizen from one of the leading countries which fought in World War I: Germany, Russia, France, Great Britain, Italy, or the United States. Because you are an expert in a specific area of study, you have received the following letter, which asks you to help to develop a treaty to end the war.



**GEORGES CLEMENCEAU, PREMIER OF FRANCE
CHAIRMAN OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE**

**PARIS FRANCE
18 MAY 1919**

Committee Delegate:

The Conference Commission requests your immediate presence in Paris as a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference. After months of deliberation, the Peace Treaty to end the war will undergo formal negotiations in four specific areas beginning 1 June 1919. You and four fellow citizens, experts in the areas of economics, geography, ethics, military history, and international negotiations, have been appointed by your government to represent them in the process. Each country present will be allowed to participate in a seven day review and deliberation of the terms of the peace.

Your timely presence in Paris by 1 June 1919 will allow your country to be heard. As Chairman of the Peace Conference, I assure you that your task will be difficult, but of supreme importance to the future of Europe and the world. We must remember what defeat would have cost us, and what peace must assure us.

Georges Clemenceau

**GEORGES CLEMENCEAU
PREMIER OF FRANCE**



The Process:

In order to understand the position your country takes at the end of this "war to end all wars", it is necessary to provide the Conference Committee with a statement of purpose. At your initial meeting your country is to ascertain what

resources you may need, and discuss where you may find them. You will have two days to research the views of experts from your country and from any sources you may wish to consult, including those listed below and others available in our fine library. In three days your group will present aloud and in writing a one page letter of intent to the Committee, explaining your country's position as you enter expert negotiations. What has World War I meant to your country? What do you hope these negotiations will accomplish?

Next, experts will be asked to meet with fellow expert representatives of all of the countries present at the Conference. Each country has enlisted its finest minds to discuss the topics of reparations, territorial changes, military power, ethics, and world affairs. While experts should primarily consider the intentions of their own country, they should also consider what effects the terms of this treaty may have upon future world relationships. You will research and negotiate the following terms:

Economists, you will help determine what costs were incurred because of the War, and what amount of reparations, if any, should be paid.

Geographers, You will help determine what territorial boundaries will be established as provisions of the Treaty.

Ethicists, you will determine which, if any country, is responsible for causing the War.

Military Experts, you will determine what restrictions or regulations upon military power will be required by the Treaty.

Ambassadors, you will be spokesperson for your group at all Conference meetings. You may call upon experts to support your testimony. You are responsible for the scheduling of tasks, to be certain your country complies with the Official Conference Agenda. At expert meetings you may speak only to your delegates.

Fact Finding Tasks

Following expert negotiations, each country will meet to review the treaty created by your experts. You will decide whether your country will or will not sign the Treaty. On June 28, 1919 the Treaty will be ceremoniously signed at the Palace of Versailles. Each country will deliver a one minute address to be broadcast on radios throughout the world, justifying your decision. A written copy should be provided for the world press.



Resources:

In addition to your textbook, encyclopedias, and other books available to you, the following internet sources will help you to complete this task.

[The Peace Settlements: Treaty of Versailles](#)

Overview of the events and decisions made at the W.W.I Peace Conference.

[The Economic Consequences of Peace](#)

Explanation of how the W.W.I Peace Treaty relates to economics, by the famous economist John Maynard Keynes.

[The Versailles Treaty and Related Documents](#)

In addition to the complete Versailles Peace Treaty, this web site has many related documents, such as maps, charts and photos.

[Armies Mobilized and Casualties: 1914-18](#)

Figures on W.W.I armies are available here.

[Financial Cost of War](#)

Figures on W.W.I costs are available here.

[The World War I Document Archive](#)

An archive of primary documents from World War I.

[W.W.I Sites: Links to Other Resources](#)

Lots of connections to resources about W.W.I.

[President Wilson and W.W.I](#)

A version of how the war began.

[World War I - Trenches on the Web](#)

A collection of W.W.I resources.

Learning Advice:

This section is here to help students stay on the right track, so that you will be prepared for the discussions, debates, and voting which will occur over the next ten days. Your country's future depends upon your careful negotiations. First, remember that your highest priority is the welfare of your country. You must carefully research what has happened to your country in World War I so that you will know what you want to achieve. Your letter of intent will explain to the rest of the countries what you hope to accomplish during these negotiations.

When you move into the expert group phase you will write specific terms for the treaty based upon your knowledge in this area, as outlined in THE PROCESS section. On Day 6 below you will find a task to complete which will prepare you to meet with other experts and write terms for the treaty. You will negotiate with other experts and vote your expert group's terms.

On Day 8 you will be reunited with your country groups. This will be your opportunity to explain the terms you have created in expert groups and to review the treaty created with each expert group's terms. Now, you will have to decide as a country whether you will sign this treaty. Your country will discuss this and take a vote.

Your last task as a country is to write a statement which your ambassador will deliver to the world press, who are anxiously awaiting your decision. This statement should explain your reaction to the negotiations, the treaty, and why you have made the decision to sign (or not sign) the treaty.

Your Agenda:

Please review this schedule as all meetings will begin promptly as scheduled. Extra space is provided on each daily agenda for tasks you may wish to add to help accomplish your goal: creating the best treaty possible.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Review agenda Country meetings (homework)	Library Research (In class)	Library Research (In class)		Experts: Library Research and Fact Finding (homework)
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Individual Expert Treaty Terms due Presentation of suggested terms to Expert Groups Discussion (In class)	Experts Discuss, Develop and Write Treaty terms Each Expert group will adopt Treaty terms by majority vote (In class)	Country Meetings Experts Present Terms to their countries Country Delegations : Vote and provide written justification (In class)	Press Conference Treaty of Versailles (In class)	Written response Unit Evaluation